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JOHN CHRISTOPHER



I

DAWN AND MORNING

JOHN CHRISTOPHER
is published in four volumes
with the following sub-titles

Dawn and Morning

Storm and Stress

John Christopher in Paris

Journey's End

ROMAIN ROLLAND

John Christopher

DAWN AND MORNING

Translated by

GILBERT CANNAN

With an Introduction by

RICHARD CHURCH



HEINEMANN

LONDON MELBOURNE TORONTO

William Heinemann Ltd
LONDON MELBOURNE TORONTO
CAPE TOWN AUCKLAND
THE HAGUE

First published in Great Britain 1910
Re-issued 1960

Printed in Great Britain
by Billing and Sons Limited
Guildford and London

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INTRODUCTION

IT is a formidable, and often a disillusioning experience, to re-read a book which, many years earlier, influenced one's life. It is like coming back to scenes of childhood. Everything is shrunken, lustreless. The light has gone out. Either that, or time has put its cataract over our eyes.

I first read Gilbert Cannan's translation of *John Christopher* in 1916, during the darkest days of the First World War. Now, forty-three years later, I have read it again, as the result of a request from the publisher that I should write this Preface. I must, half-consciously perhaps, have referred to the book again and again in the course of my professional work in the world of books. Otherwise, my enthusiasm would not be known.

Has that enthusiasm been justified, or was my first reading in my youth entirely uncritical? This is a terrible question, and I began to re-read the first of the four volumes with trepidation, fearing the worst. I recalled vividly how overwhelmed I was by that first reading; how it drove me in a fever of new enquiry to examine the whole process of artistic creation, its roots in life, its disciplines and demands, its absorption of character and personal vitality, its final relentlessness.

All that was but theory; part of a young man's hopes and ambitions. Now, I have returned to the book in the light of my own experience, a lifetime of experience, in letters and music; more deeply committed than ever to my work, but alas, more and more fastidious and prone to

devastating recognition of sources, imitations, fakes.

Thus, fearfully, I took up *John Christopher* again—and I have been instantly compelled, as I was over forty years ago, to submit to the magic of a fiction completely matured, through image, event, characterisation, and innate wisdom. I had expected to disinter romantic and sentimental vagueness (so often the ingredients of novels written round the lives of musicians). But there is no sentimentality here; nothing but sagacity and a fierce emotional drive that cuts all the cackle and shows human beings, hundreds of them in all walks of life, displaying themselves unconsciously to the genius of the author, in their work, play, passions, religious revelations, fears and hopes. He gets it all down, in crisp prose and concise narrative. There is no long, drawn-out commentary. Something is happening all the time; and when Romain Rolland says anything about what is happening, and why it is happening, he does so with an abruptness and vigour that add to the march of the story and the verisimilitude of the characters. These people, in their hundreds, are living people. They suffer and they make the reader suffer too.

What is the occasion for this large creation of a West European cosmos so fully articulated? It is to show the birth, growth and authority of a creative genius. John Christopher, the hostile critic may object, is a kind of amalgam of Beethoven and Wagner, the events of his career being frankly drawn from those of the lives of these two masters. But that is no matter. Indeed, it gives a kind of location, a recognisable authenticity, to the tale. Somehow, one feels, all this *has* happened.

And to what purpose? Principally, to try to get down to the very roots of the creative impulse; to show how utterly different the working of genius is from that of

talent. We are given, in the first volume, the childhood and boyhood of Christopher, in a Rhineland town. The opening moves with gradualness (which is different from *slowness*) through the dawn of infant sensations, rudimentary ideas, contacts and recognitions. But with what speed it augments toward the destiny in store for this child. Emotion (and emotion is the foundation and sustenance of the vast work) quickly comes into play, touching every individual into life, even violent life. For gesture, extravagance of mood, mark the goings on of these mortals destined to play their parts in the evolution of Christopher and his life-work. I would say of the book as a whole that this is what marks it out for distinction and authority, giving it the strength to survive through half a century; this emotional force, sweeping through it from first to last like a tide rolling in from the Atlantic. It has carried me, as you see, once more off my feet, as it did forty years ago. That is the simple part of it; the motive, the elemental. A boy could appreciate that.

He could not possibly, however, appreciate the niceties. He had neither equipment nor personal experience to take those and measure them against reality. But I can do so now. I see today with what infinite perception, what patience and that science of the soul which we call wisdom, Rolland set out to fill the vast canvas which he had prepared with such a lavish expenditure of ambition. So few writers can portray genius. They talk *about* it, but they do not give it in action, as it toils and moils within the shrinking framework of a single human body and mind. Rolland does so. This John Christopher is, in the beginning, an uncouth young savage, thwarted and twisted by his home life and his early struggles against an oppressive environment. We recognise the grandfather, first to observe the seed of music within the child; the meek,

simple mother, the father enslaved by vanity and drink but nevertheless a true musician, professional in his approach to the possibilities in the child. We share that child's gropings (they might be compared with those of the Danish composer, Carl Nielsen, as he described them in his fragment of autobiography), his pathetic first love, his graspings at friendships that shall enlarge his sensibility and confidence. As the work develops, we see how one by one, his loves and acquaintances, especially those of his Paris period (where he becomes intimate with a scrupulous and refined French poet and his sister), act upon his nature as hammers of destiny, helping to shape the molten force as it accumulates within his capacious nature.

How right was the critic in *The Times*, who saluted the first volume when it appeared in 1910, with these words: "In the whole of European contemporary fiction it would be hard to find a work in which subtlety of insight, delicacy of analysis, and unflinching truth in presenting the results of insight and analysis are combined in a more vivid whole than they are in M. Romain Rolland's novel *Jean Christophe*."

I hope that the present-day critic of *The Times* will see, as his predecessor saw, the quality of this great work of fiction, a work which earned for its author the Nobel Prize for Literature, and which survives, for at least one re-reader, the test of forty-three years that have been given wholly to the profession of letters.

RICHARD CHURCH

PART I

THE DAWN

Dianzi nell' alba che precede al giorno, quando l' anima
tua dentro dormia. . . .

Purgatorio, ix.

I

Come, quando i vapori umidi e spessi a diradar cominciansi, la spera del sol debilmente entra per essi. . . .

Purgatorio, xvii.

FROM behind the house rises the murmuring of the river. All day long the rain has been beating against the window-panes ; a stream of water trickles down the window at the corner where it is broken. The yellowish light of the day dies down. The room is dim and dull.

The new-born child stirs in his cradle. Although the old man left his sabots at the door when he entered, his footsteps make the floor creak. The child begins to whine. The mother leans out of her bed to comfort it ; and the grandfather gropes to light the lamp, so that the child shall not be frightened by the night when he awakes. The flame of the lamp lights up old Jean Michel's red face, with its rough white beard and morose expression and quick eyes. He goes near the cradle. His cloak smells wet, and as he walks he drags his large blue list slippers. Louisa signs to him not to go too near. She is fair, almost white ; her features are drawn ; her gentle, stupid face is marked with red in patches ; her lips are pale and swollen, and they are parted in a timid smile ; her eyes devour the child—and her eyes are blue and vague : the

pupils are small, but there is an infinite tenderness in them.

The child wakes and cries, and his eyes are troubled. Oh ! how terrible ! The darkness, the sudden flash of the lamp, the hallucinations of a mind as yet hardly detached from chaos, the stifling, roaring night in which it is enveloped, the illimitable gloom from which, like blinding shafts of light, there emerge acute sensations, sorrows, phantoms—those enormous faces leaning over him, those eyes that pierce through him, penetrating, are beyond his comprehension ! . . . He has not the strength to cry out ; terror holds him motionless, with eyes and mouth wide open and he rattles in his throat. His large head, that seems to have swollen up, is wrinkled with the grotesque and lamentable grimaces that he makes ; the skin of his face and hands is brown and purple, and spotted with yellow. . . .

“ Dear God ! ” said the old man with conviction, “ How ugly he is ! ”

He put the lamp down on the table.

Louisa pouted like a scolded child. Jean Michel looked at her out of the corner of his eye and laughed.

“ You don’t want me to say that he is beautiful ? You would not believe it. Come, it is not your fault. They are all like that. ”

The child came out of the stupor and immobility into which he had been thrown by the light of the lamp and the eyes of the old man. He began to cry. Perhaps he felt instinctively in his mother’s eyes a caress which made it possible for him to complain. She held out her arms to him and said :

"Give him to me."

The old man began, as usual, to air his theories :

"You ought not to give way to children when they cry. You must just let them cry."

But he came and took the child and grumbled :

"I never saw one quite so ugly."

Louisa took the child feverishly and pressed it to her bosom. She looked at it with a bashful and delighted smile.

"Oh, my poor child!" she said shamefacedly.

"How ugly you are—how ugly! and how I love you!"

Jean Michel went back to the fireside. He began to poke the fire in protest, but a smile gave the lie to the moroseness and solemnity of his expression.

"Good girl!" he said. "Don't worry about it. He has plenty of time to alter. And even so, what does it matter? Only one thing is asked of him: that he should grow into an honest man."

The child was comforted by contact with his mother's warm body. He could be heard sucking her milk and gurgling and snorting. Jean Michel turned in his chair, and said once more, with some emphasis :

"There is nothing finer than an honest man."

He was silent for a moment, pondering whether it would not be proper to elaborate this thought; but he found nothing more to say, and after a silence he said irritably :

"Why isn't your husband here?"

"I think he is at the theatre," said Louisa timidly.

"There is a rehearsal."

"The theatre is closed. I passed it just now. One of his lies."

"No. Don't be always blaming him. I must have

misunderstood. He must have been kept for one of his lessons."

"He ought to have come back," said the old man, not satisfied. He stopped for a moment, and then asked, in a rather lower voice and with some shame :

"Has he been . . . again ?"

"No, father—no, father," said Louisa hurriedly.

The old man looked at her ; she avoided his eyes.

"It is not true. You are lying."

She wept in silence.

"Dear God !" said the old man, kicking at the fire with his foot. The poker fell with a clatter. The mother and the child trembled.

"Father, please—please !" said Louisa. "You will make him cry."

The child hesitated for a second or two whether to cry or to go on with his meal ; but not being able to do both at once, he went on with the latter.

Jean Michel went on in a lower tone, though with outbursts of anger :

"What have I done to the good God to have this drunkard for my son ? What is the use of my having lived as I have lived, and of having denied myself everything all my life ! But you—you—can't you do anything to stop it ? Heavens ! That's what you ought to do. . . . You should keep him at home ! . . ."

Louisa wept still more.

"Don't scold me ! . . . I am unhappy enough as it is ! I have done everything I could. If you knew how terrified I am when I am alone ! Always I seem to hear his step on the stairs. Then I wait for the door to open, or I ask myself : 'O God ! what will he look like ?' . . . It makes me ill to think of it !"

She was shaken by her sobs. The old man grew anxious. He went to her and laid the dishevelled bed-clothes about her trembling shoulders and caressed her head with his hands.

"Come, come, don't be afraid. I am here."

She calmed herself for the child's sake, and tried to smile.

"I was wrong to tell you that."

The old man shook his head as he looked at her.

"My poor child, it was not much of a present that I gave you."

"It is my own fault," she said. "He ought not to have married me. He is sorry for what he did."

"What, do you mean that he regrets ? . . ."

"You know. You were angry yourself because I became his wife."

"We won't talk about that. It is true I was vexed. A young man like that—I can say so without hurting you—a young man whom I had carefully brought up, a distinguished musician, a real artist—might have looked higher than you, who had nothing and were of a lower class, and not even of the same trade. For more than a hundred years no Krafft has ever married a woman who was not a musician ! But, you know, I bear you no grudge, and am fond of you, and have been ever since I learned to know you. Besides, there's no going back on a choice once it's made ; there's nothing left but to do one's duty honestly."

He went and sat down again, thought for a little, and then said, with the solemnity in which he invested all his aphorisms :

"The first thing in life is to do one's duty."

He waited for contradiction, and spat on the fire.

Then, as neither mother nor child raised any objection, he was for going on, but relapsed into silence.

* * * * *

They said no more. Both Jean Michel, sitting by the fireside, and Louisa, in her bed, dreamed sadly. The old man, in spite of what he had said, had better thoughts about his son's marriage, and Louisa was thinking of it also, and blaming herself, although she had nothing wherewith to reproach herself.

She had been a servant when, to everybody's surprise, and her own especially, she married Melchior Krafft, Jean Michel's son. The Kraffts were without fortune, but were considerable people in the little Rhine town in which the old man had settled down more than fifty years before. Both father and son were musicians, and known to all the musicians of the country from Cologne to Mannheim. Melchior played the violin at the Hof-Theater, and Jean Michel had formerly been director of the grand-ducal concerts. The old man had been profoundly humiliated by his son's marriage, for he had built great hopes upon Melchior : he had wished to make him the distinguished man which he had failed to become himself. This mad freak destroyed all his ambitions. He had stormed at first, and showered curses upon Melchior and Louisa. But, being a good-hearted creature, he forgave his daughter-in-law when he learned to know her better ; and he even came by a paternal affection for her, which showed itself for the most part in snubs.

No one ever understood what it was that drove Melchior to such a marriage—least of all Melchior. It was certainly not Louisa's beauty. She had no seduc-

tive quality : she was small, rather pale, and delicate, and she was a striking contrast to Melchior and Jean Michel, who were both big and broad, red-faced giants, heavy-handed, hearty eaters and drinkers, laughter-loving and noisy. She seemed to be crushed by them ; no one noticed her, and she seemed to wish to escape even what little notice she attracted. If Melchior had been a kind-hearted man, it would have been credible that he should prefer Louisa's simple goodness to every other advantage ; but a vainer man never was. It seemed incredible that a young man of his kidney, fairly good-looking, and quite conscious of it, very foolish, but not without talent, and in a position to look for some well-dowered match, and capable even—who knows ?—of turning the head of one of his pupils among the people of the town, should suddenly have chosen a girl of the people—poor, uneducated, without beauty, a girl who could in no way advance his career.

But Melchior was one of those men who always do the opposite of what is expected of them and of what they expect of themselves. It is not that they are not warned—a man who is warned is worth two men, says the proverb. They profess never to be the dupe of anything, and that they steer their ship with unerring hand towards a definite point. But they reckon without themselves, for they do not know themselves. In one of those moments of forgetfulness which are habitual with them they let go the tiller, and, as is natural when things are left to themselves, they take a naughty pleasure in rounding on their masters. The ship which is released from its course at once strikes a rock, and Melchior, bent upon intrigue, married a cook. And yet he was neither drunk nor in a stupor

on the day when he bound himself to her for life, and he was not under any passionate impulse ; far from it. But perhaps there are in us forces other than mind and heart, other even than the senses—mysterious forces which take hold of us in the moments when the others are asleep ; and perhaps it was such forces that Melchior had found in the depths of those pale eyes which had looked at him so timidly one evening when he had accosted the girl on the bank of the river and had sat down beside her in the reeds—without knowing why—and had given her his hand.

Hardly was he married than he was appalled by what he had done, and he did not hide what he felt from poor Louisa, who humbly asked his pardon. He was not a bad fellow, and he willingly granted her that ; but immediately remorse would seize him again when he was with his friends or in the houses of his rich pupils, who were disdainful in their treatment of him, and no longer trembled at the touch of his hand when he corrected the position of their fingers on the keyboard. Then he would return gloomy of countenance, and Louisa, with a catch at her heart, would read in it with the first glance the customary reproach ; or he would stay out late at one inn or another, there to seek self-respect or kindness from others. On such evenings he would return shouting with laughter, and this was more doleful for Louisa than the hidden reproach and gloomy rancour that prevailed on other days. She felt that she was to a certain extent responsible for the fits of madness in which the small remnant of her husband's sense would disappear, together with the household money. Melchior sank lower and lower. At an age when he should have been

engaged in unceasing toil to develop his mediocre talent, he just let things slide, and others took his place.

But what did that matter to the unknown force which had thrown him in with the little flaxen-haired servant? He had played his part, and little John Christopher had just set foot on this earth whither his destiny had thrust him.

* * * * *

Night was fully come. Louisa's voice roused old Jean Michel from the torpor into which he had sunk by the fireside as he thought of the sorrows of the past and present.

"It must be late, father," said the young woman affectionately. "You ought to go home; you have far to go."

"I am waiting for Melchior," replied the old man.

"Please, no. I would rather you did not stay."

"Why?"

The old man raised his head and looked fiercely at her.

She did not reply.

He resumed.

"You are afraid. You do not want me to meet him?"

"Yes, yes; it would only make things worse. You would make each other angry, and I don't want that. Please, please go!"

The old man sighed, rose, and said:

"Well . . . I'll go."

He went to her and brushed her forehead with his stiff beard. He asked if she wanted anything, put out the lamp, and went stumbling against the chairs in the

darkness of the room. But he had no sooner reached the staircase than he thought of his son returning drunk, and he stopped at each step, imagining a thousand dangers that might arise if Melchior were allowed to return alone. . . .

In the bed by his mother's side the child was stirring again. An unknown sorrow had arisen from the depths of his being. He stiffened himself against her. He twisted his body, clenched his fists, and knitted his brows. His suffering increased steadily, quietly, certain of its strength. He knew not what it was, nor whence it came. It appeared immense, and to be infinite, and he began to cry lamentably. His mother caressed him with her gentle hands. Already his suffering was less acute. But he went on weeping, for he felt it still near, still inside himself. A man who suffers can lessen his anguish by knowing whence it comes. By thought he can locate it in a certain portion of his body which can be cured, or, if necessary, torn away. He fixes the bounds of it, and separates it from himself. A child has no such illusive resource. His first encounter with suffering is more tragic and more true. Like his own being, it seems infinite. He feels that it is seated in his bosom, housed in his heart, and is mistress of his flesh. And it is so. It will not leave his body until it has eaten it away.

His mother hugs him to her, murmuring: "It is done—it is done! Don't cry, my little Jesus, my little goldfish. . . ." But his intermittent outcry continues. It is as though this wretched, unformed, and unconscious mass had a presentiment of a whole life of sorrow awaiting him, and nothing can appease him. . . .

The bells of St. Martin rang out in the night. Their

voices are solemn and slow. In the damp air they come like footsteps on moss. The child became silent in the middle of a sob. The marvellous music, like a flood of milk, surged sweetly through him. The night was lit up ; the air was moist and tender. His sorrow disappeared, his heart began to laugh, and he slid into his dreams with a sigh of abandonment.

The three bells went on softly ringing in the morrow's festival. Louisa also dreamed, as she listened to them, of her own past misery and of what would become in the future of the dear little child sleeping by her side. She had been for hours lying in her bed, weary and suffering. Her hands and her body were burning ; the heavy eiderdown crushed her ; she felt crushed and oppressed by the darkness ; but she dared not move. She looked at the child, and the night did not prevent her reading his features, that looked so old. Sleep overcame her ; fevered images passed through her brain. She thought she heard Melchior open the door, and her heart leaped. Occasionally the murmuring of the stream rose more loudly through the silence, like the roaring of some beast. The window once or twice gave a sound under the beating of the rain. The bells rang out more slowly, and then died down, and Louisa slept by the side of her child.

All this time Jean Michel was waiting outside the house, dripping with rain, his beard wet with the mist. He was waiting for the return of his wretched son, for his mind, never ceasing, had insisted on telling him all sorts of tragedies brought about by drunkenness ; and although he did not believe them, he could not have slept a wink if he had gone away without having seen his son return. The sound of the bells made him

melancholy, for he remembered all his shattered hopes. He thought of what he was doing at such an hour in the street, and for very shame he wept.

* * * * *

The vast tide of the days moves slowly. Day and night come up and go down with unfailing regularity, like the ebb and flow of an infinite ocean. Weeks and months go by, and then begin again, and the succession of days is like one day.

The day is immense, inscrutable, marking the even beat of light and darkness, and the beat of the life of the torpid creature dreaming in the depths of his cradle—his imperious needs, sorrowful or glad—so regular that the night and the day which bring them seem by them to be brought about.

The pendulum of life moves heavily, and in its slow beat the whole creature seems to be absorbed. The rest is no more than dreams, snatches of dreams, formless and swarming, and dust of atoms dancing aimlessly, a dizzy whirl passing, and bringing laughter or horror. Outcry, moving shadows, grinning shapes, sorrows, terrors, laughter, dreams, dreams. . . . All is a dream, both day and night. . . . And in such chaos the light of friendly eyes that smile upon him, the flood of joy that surges through his body from his mother's body, from her breasts filled with milk—the force that is in him, the immense, unconscious force gathering in him, the turbulent ocean roaring in the narrow prison of the child's body. For eyes that could see into it there would be revealed whole worlds half buried in the darkness, nebulae taking shape, a universe in the making. His being is limitless. He is all that there is. . . .

Months pass. . . . Islands of memory begin to rise above the river of his life. At first they are little uncharted islands, rocks just peeping above the surface of the waters. Round about them and behind in the twilight of the dawn stretches the great untroubled sheet of water ; then new islands, touched to gold by the sun.

So from the abyss of the soul there emerge shapes definite, and scenes of a strange clarity. In the boundless day which dawns once more, ever the same, with its great monotonous beat, there begins to show forth the round of days, hand in hand, and their forms are smiling some, sad others. But ever the links of the chain are broken, and memories are linked together above weeks and months. . . .

The River . . . the Bells . . . as long as he can remember—far back in the abysses of time, at every hour of his life—always their voices, familiar and resonant, have rung out. . . .

Night—half asleep—a pale light made white the window. . . . The river murmurs. Through the silence its voice rises omnipotent ; it reigns over all creatures. Sometimes it caresses their sleep, and seems almost itself to die away in the roaring of its torrent. Sometimes it grows angry, and howls like a furious beast about to bite. The clamour ceases. Now there is a murmuring of infinite tenderness, silvery sounds like clear little bells, like the laughter of children, or soft singing voices, or dancing music—a great mother voice that never, never goes to sleep ! It rocks the child, as it has rocked through the ages, from birth to death, the generations that were before him ; it fills all his thoughts, and lives in all his dreams, wraps him

round with the cloak of its fluid harmonies, which still will be about him when he lies in the little cemetery that sleeps by the water's edge, washed by the Rhine. . . .

The bells. . . . It is dawn! They answer each other's call, sad, melancholy, friendly, gentle. At the sound of their slow voices there rise in him hosts of dreams—dreams of the past, desires, hopes, regrets for creatures who are gone, unknown to the child, although he had his being, for it was in them, and they live again in him. Ages of memory ring out in that music. So much mourning, so many festivals! And from the depths of the room it is as though, when they are heard, there passed lovely waves of sound through the soft air, free winging birds, and the moist souging of the wind. Through the window smiles a patch of blue sky; a sunbeam slips through the curtains to the bed. The little world known to the eyes of the child, all that he can see from his bed every morning as he awakes, all that with so much effort he is beginning to recognize and classify, so that he may be master of it—his kingdom is lit up. There is the table where people eat, the cupboard where he hides to play, the tiled floor along which he crawls, and the wall-paper which in its antic shapes holds for him so many humorous or terrifying stories, and the clock which chatters and stammers so many words which he alone can understand. How many things there are in this room! He does not know them all. Every day he sets out on a voyage of exploration in this universe which is his. Everything is his. Nothing is immaterial; everything has its worth, man or fly. Everything lives—the cat, the fire, the table, the grains of

dust which dance in a sunbeam. The room is a country, a day is a lifetime. How is a creature to know himself in the midst of these vast spaces ? The world is so large ! A creature is lost in it. And the faces, the actions, the movement, the noise, which make round about him an unending turmoil ! . . . He is weary ; his eyes close ; he goes to sleep. That sweet deep sleep that overcomes him suddenly at any time, and wherever he may be—on his mother's lap, or under the table, where he loves to hide ! . . . It is good. All is good. . . .

These first days come buzzing up in his mind like a field of corn or a wood stirred by the wind, and cast in shadow by the great fleeting clouds. . . .

The shadows pass : the sun penetrates the forest. Christopher begins to find his way through the labyrinth of the day.

It is morning. His parents are asleep. He is in his little bed, lying on his back. He looks at the rays of light dancing on the ceiling. There is infinite amusement in it. Now he laughs out loud with one of those jolly children's laughs which stir the hearts of those that hear them. His mother leans out of her bed towards him, and says : " What is it, then, little mad thing ? " Then he laughs again, and perhaps he makes an effort to laugh because he has an audience. His mamma looks severe, and lays a finger on her lips to warn him lest he should wake his father : but her weary eyes smile in spite of herself. They whisper together. Then there is a furious growl from his father. Both tremble. His mother hastily turns her back on him, like a naughty little girl : she pretends

to be asleep. Christopher buries himself in his bed, and holds his breath. . . . Dead silence.

After some time the little face hidden under the clothes comes to the surface again. On the roof the weathercock creaks. The rain-pipe gurgles; the angelus sounds. When the wind comes from the east, the distant bells of the villages on the other bank of the river give answer. The sparrows foregathered in the ivy-clad wall make a deafening noise, from which three or four voices, always the same, ring out more shrilly than the others, just as in the games of a band of children. A pigeon coos at the top of a chimney. The child abandons himself to the lullaby of these sounds. He hums to himself softly, then a little more loudly, then quite loudly, then very loudly, until once more his father cries out in exasperation: "That little donkey never will be quiet! Wait a little, and I'll pull your ears!" Then Christopher buries himself in the bedclothes again, and does not know whether to laugh or cry. He is terrified and humiliated; and at the same time the idea of the donkey with which his father has compared him makes him burst out laughing. From the depths of his bed he imitates its braying. This time he is whipped. He sheds every tear that is in him. What has he done? He wanted so much to laugh and to get up! And he is forbidden to budge. How do people sleep for ever? When will they get up? . . .

One day he could not contain himself. He heard a cat and a dog and something queer in the street. He slipped out of bed, and, creeping awkwardly with his bare feet on the tiles, he tried to go down the stairs to see what it was; but the door was shut. To open it,

he climbed on to a chair ; the whole thing collapsed, and he hurt himself and howled. And once more at the top of the stairs he was whipped. He is always being whipped ! . . .

He is in church with his grandfather. He is bored. He is not very comfortable. He is forbidden to stir, and all the people are saying all together words that he does not understand. They all look solemn and gloomy. It is not their usual way of looking. He looks at them, half frightened. Old Lena, their neighbour, who is sitting next to him, looks very cross ; there are moments when he does not recognize even his grandfather. He is afraid a little. Then he grows used to it, and tries to find relief from boredom by every means at his disposal. He balances on one leg, twists his neck to look at the ceiling, makes faces, pulls his grandfather's coat, investigates the straws in his chair, tries to make a hole in them with his finger, listens to the singing of birds, and yawns so that he is like to dislocate his jaw.

Suddenly there is a deluge of sound : the organ is played. A thrill goes down his spine. He turns and stands with his chin resting on the back of his chair, and he looks very wise. He does not understand this noise ; he does not know the meaning of it ; it is dazzling, bewildering, and he can hear nothing clearly. But it is good. It is as though he were no longer sitting there on an uncomfortable chair in a tiresome old house. He is suspended in mid-air, like a bird ; and when the flood of sound rushes from one end of the church to the other, filling the arches, reverberating from wall to wall, he is carried with it, flying and

skimming hither and thither, with nothing to do but to abandon himself to it. He is free ; he is happy. The sun shines. . . . He falls asleep.

His grandfather is displeased with him. He behaves ill at Mass.

He is at home, sitting on the ground, with his feet in his hands. He has just decided that the doormat is a boat, and the tiled floor a river. He all but drowned in stepping off the carpet. He is surprised and a little put out that the others pay no attention to the matter as he does when he goes into the room. He seizes his mother by the skirts. "You see, it is water ! You must go across by the bridge." (The bridge is a series of holes between the red tiles.) His mother crosses without even listening to him. He is vexed, as a dramatic author is vexed when he sees his audience talking during his great work.

Next moment he thinks no more of it. The tiled floor is no longer the sea. He is lying down on it, stretched full-length, with his chin on the tiles, humming music of his own composition, and gravely sucking his thumb and dribbling. He is lost in contemplation of a crack between the tiles. The lines of the tiles grimace like faces. The imperceptible hole grows larger, and becomes a valley ; there are mountains about it. A centipede moves : it is as large as an elephant. Thunder might crash, the child would not hear it.

No one bothers about him, and he has no need of anyone. He can even do without doormat boats, and caverns in the tiled floor, with their fantastic fauna. His body is enough. What a source of entertainment !

He spends hours in looking at his nails and shouting with laughter. They have all different faces, and are like people that he knows. And the rest of his body! . . . He goes on with the inspection of all that he has. How many surprising things! There are so many marvels. He is absorbed in looking at them.

But he was very roughly picked up when they caught him at it.

Sometimes he takes advantage of his mother's back being turned to escape from the house. At first they used to run after him and bring him back. Then they got used to letting him go alone, so only he did not go too far away. The house is at the end of the town; the country begins almost at once. As long as he is within sight of the windows he goes without stopping, very deliberately, and now and then hopping on one foot. But as soon as he has passed the corner of the road, and the brushwood hides him from view, he changes abruptly. He stops there, with his finger in his mouth, to find out what story he shall tell himself that day; for he is full of stories. True, they are all very much like each other, and every one of them could be told in a few lines. He chooses. Generally he takes up the same story, sometimes from the point where it left off, sometimes from the beginning, with variations. But any trifle—a word heard by chance—is enough to set his mind off on another direction.

Chance was fruitful of resources. It is impossible to imagine what can be made of a simple piece of wood, a broken bough found alongside a hedge. (You break them off when you do not find them.) It was a magic wand. If it were long and thin, it became a

lance, or perhaps a sword ; to brandish it aloft was enough to cause armies to spring from the earth. Christopher was their general, marching in front of them, setting them an example, and leading them to the assault of a hillock. If the branch were flexible, it changed into a whip. Christopher mounted on horseback and leaped precipices. Sometimes his mount would slip, and the horseman would find himself at the bottom of the ditch, sorrowfully looking at his dirty hands and barked knees. If the wand were lithe, then Christopher would make himself the conductor of an orchestra : he would be both conductor and orchestra ; he conducted and he sang ; and then he would salute the bushes, with their little green heads stirring in the wind.

He was also a magician. He walked with great strides through the fields, looking at the sky and waving his arms. He commanded the clouds. He wished them to go to the right, but they went to the left. Then he would abuse them, and repeat his command. He would watch them out of the corner of his eye, and his heart would beat as he looked to see if there were not at least a little one which would obey him. But they went on calmly moving to the left. Then he would stamp his foot, and threaten them with his stick, and angrily order them to go to the left ; and this time, in truth, they obeyed him. He was happy and proud of his power. He would touch the flowers and bid them change into golden carriages, as he had been told they did in the stories ; and, although it never happened, he was quite convinced that it would happen if only he had patience. He would look for a grasshopper to turn into a hare ; he would gently

lay his stick on its back, and speak a rune. The insect would escape : he would bar its way. A few moments later he would be lying on his belly near to it, looking at it. Then he would have forgotten that he was a magician, and just amuse himself with turning the poor beast on its back, while he laughed aloud at its contortions.

It occurred to him also to tie a piece of string to his magic wand, and gravely cast it into the river, and wait for a fish to come and bite. He knew perfectly well that fish do not usually bite at a piece of string without bait or hook ; but he thought that for once in a way, and for him, they might make an exception to their rule ; and in his inexhaustible confidence, he carried it so far as to fish in the street with a whip through the grating of a sewer. He would draw up the whip from time to time excitedly, pretending that the cord of it was more heavy, and that he had caught a treasure, as in a story that his grandfather had told him. . . .

And always in the middle of all these games there used to occur to him moments of strange dreaming and complete forgetfulness. Everything about him would then be blotted out ; he would not know what he was doing, and was not even conscious of himself. These attacks would take him unawares. Sometimes as he walked or went upstairs a void would suddenly open before him. He would seem then to have lost all thought. But when he came back to himself, he was shocked and bewildered to find himself in the same place on the dark staircase. It was as though he had lived through a whole lifetime—in the space of a few steps

His grandfather used often to take him with him on his evening walk. The little boy used to trot by his side and give him his hand. They used to go by the roads, across ploughed fields, which smelled strong and good. The grasshoppers chirped. Enormous crows poised along the road used to watch them approach from afar, and then fly away heavily as they came up with them.

His grandfather would cough. Christopher knew quite well what that meant. The old man was burning with the desire to tell a story; but he wanted it to appear that the child had asked him for one. Christopher did not fail him; they understood each other. The old man had a tremendous affection for his grandson, and it was a great joy to find in him a willing audience. He loved to tell of episodes in his own life, or stories of great men, ancient and modern. His voice would then become emphatic and filled with emotion, and would tremble with a childish joy, which he used to try to stifle. He seemed delighted to hear his own voice. Unhappily, words used to fail him when he opened his mouth to speak. He was used to such disappointment, for it always came upon him with his outbursts of eloquence. And as he used to forget it with each new attempt, he never succeeded in resigning himself to it.

He used to talk of Regulus, and Arminius, of the soldiers of Lützow, of Koerner, and of Frederic Stabs, who tried to kill the Emperor Napoleon. His face would glow as he told of incredible deeds of heroism. He used to pronounce historic words in such a solemn voice that it was impossible to hear them, and he used to try artfully to keep his hearer on tenterhooks at the

thrilling moments. He would stop, pretend to choke, and noisily blow his nose ; and his heart would leap when the child asked, in a voice choking with impatience : “ And then, grandfather ? ”

There came a day, when Christopher was a little older, when he perceived his grandfather's method ; and then he wickedly set himself to assume an air of indifference to the rest of the story, and that hurt the poor old man. But for the moment he is altogether held by the power of the story-teller. His blood leaped at the dramatic passages. He did not know what it was all about, neither where nor when these deeds were done, or whether his grandfather knew Arminius, or whether Regulus were not—God knows why!—someone whom he had seen at church last Sunday. But his heart and the old man's heart swelled with joy and pride in the tale of heroic deeds, as though they themselves had done them ; for the old man and the child were both children.

Christopher was less happy when his grandfather interpolated in the pathetic passages one of those abstruse discourses so dear to him. There were moral thoughts generally traceable to some idea, honest enough, but a little trite, such as “ Gentleness is better than violence,” or “ Honour is the dearest thing in life,” or “ It is better to be good than to be wicked ”—only they were much more involved. Christopher's grandfather had no fear of the criticism of his youthful audience, and abandoned himself to his habitual emphatic manner ; he was not afraid of repeating the same phrases, or of not finishing them, or even, if he lost himself in his discourse, of saying anything that came into his head, to stop up the gaps in his thoughts ;

and he used to punctuate his words, in order to give them greater force, with inappropriate gestures. The boy used to listen with profound respect, and he thought his grandfather very eloquent, but a little tiresome.

Both of them loved to return again and again to the fabulous legend of the Corsican conqueror who had taken Europe. Christopher's grandfather had known him. He had almost fought against him. But he was a man to admit the greatness of his adversaries : he had said so twenty times. He would have given one of his arms for such a man to have been born on this side of the Rhine. Fate had decreed otherwise ; he admired him, and had fought against him—that is, he had been on the point of fighting against him. But when Napoleon had been no farther than ten leagues away, and they had marched out to meet him, a sudden panic had dispersed the little band in a forest, and every man had fled, crying, "We are betrayed !" In vain, as the old man used to tell, in vain did he endeavour to rally the fugitives ; he threw himself in front of them, threatening them and weeping : he had been swept away in the flood of them, and on the morrow had found himself at an extraordinary distance from the field of battle—for so he called the place of the rout. But Christopher used impatiently to bring him back to the exploits of the hero, and he was delighted by his marvellous progress through the world. He saw him followed by innumerable men, giving vent to great cries of love, and at a wave of his hand hurling themselves in swarms upon flying enemies—they were always in flight. It was a fairy-tale. The old man added a little to it to fill out the story ; he conquered

Spain, and almost conquered England, which he could not abide.

Old Krafft used to intersperse his enthusiastic narratives with indignant apostrophes addressed to his hero. The patriot awoke in him, more perhaps when he told of the Emperor's defeats than of the Battle of Jena. He would stop to shake his fist at the river, and spit contemptuously, and mouth noble insults—he did not stoop to less than that. He would call him “rascal,” “wild beast,” “immoral.” And if such words were intended to restore to the boy's mind a sense of justice, it must be confessed that they failed in their object; for childish logic leaped to this conclusion: “If a great man like that had no morality, morality is not a great thing, and what matters most is to be a great man.” But the old man was far from suspecting the thoughts which were running along by his side.

They would both be silent, pondering, each after his own fashion, these admirable stories—except when the old man used to meet one of his noble patrons taking a walk. Then he would stop, and bow very low, and breathe lavishly the formulæ of obsequious politeness. The child used to blush for it without knowing why. But his grandfather at heart had a vast respect for established power and persons who had “arrived”; and possibly his great love for the heroes of whom he told was only because he saw in them persons who had arrived at a point higher than the others.

When it was very hot, old Krafft used to sit under a tree, and was not long in dozing off. Then Christopher used to sit near him on a heap of loose stones or a milestone, or some high seat, uncomfortable and peculiar;

and he used to wag his little legs, and hum to himself, and dream. Or sometimes he used to lie on his back and watch the clouds go by ; they looked like oxen, and giants, and hats, and old ladies, and immense landscapes. He used to talk to them in a low voice, or be absorbed in a little cloud which a great one was on the point of devouring. He was afraid of those which were very black, almost blue, and of those which went very fast. It seemed to him that they played an enormous part in life, and he was surprised that neither his grandfather nor his mother paid any attention to them. They were terrible beings if they wished to do harm. Fortunately, they used to go by, kindly enough, a little grotesque, and they did not stop. The boy used in the end to turn giddy with watching them too long, and he used to fidget with his legs and arms, as though he were on the point of falling from the sky. His eyelids then would wink, and sleep would overcome him. Silence. . . . The leaves murmur gently and tremble in the sun ; a faint mist passes through the air ; the uncertain flies hover, booming like an organ ; the grasshoppers, drunk with the summer, chirp eagerly and hurriedly ; all is silent. . . . Under the vault of the trees the cry of the green woodpecker has magic sounds. Far away on the plain a peasant's voice harangues his oxen ; the shoes of a horse ring out on the white road. Christopher's eyes close. Near him an ant passes along a dead branch across a furrow. He loses consciousness. . . . Ages have passed. He wakes. The ant has not yet crossed the twig.

Sometimes the old man would sleep too long, and his face would grow rigid, and his long nose would grow

longer, and his mouth stand open. Christopher used then to look at him uneasily, and in fear of seeing his head change gradually into some fantastic shape. He used to sing loudly, so as to wake him up, or tumble down noisily from his heap of stones. One day it occurred to him to throw a handful of pine-needles in his grandfather's face, and tell him that they had fallen from the tree. The old man believed him, and that made Christopher laugh. But, unfortunately, he tried the trick again, and just when he had raised his hand he saw his grandfather's eyes watching him. It was a terrible affair. The old man was solemn, and allowed no liberty to be taken with the respect due to himself. They were estranged for more than a week.

The worse the road was, the more beautiful it was to Christopher. Every stone had a meaning for him ; he knew them all. The shape of a rut seemed to him to be a geographical accident almost of the same kind as the great mass of the Taunus. In his head he had the map of all the ditches and hillocks of the region extending two kilometres round about the house, and when he made any change in the fixed ordering of the furrows he thought himself no less important than an engineer with a gang of navvies ; and when with his heel he crushed the dried top of a clod of earth, and filled up the valley at the foot of it, it seemed to him that his day had not been wasted.

Sometimes they would meet a peasant in his cart on the highroad, and if the peasant knew Christopher's grandfather they would climb up by his side. That was a Paradise on earth. The horse went fast, and Christopher laughed with delight, except when they

passed other people walking ; then he would look serious and indifferent, like a person accustomed to drive in a carriage, but his heart was filled with pride. His grandfather and the man would talk without bothering about him. Hidden and crushed by their legs, hardly sitting, sometimes not sitting at all, he was perfectly happy. He talked aloud, without troubling about any answer to what he said. He watched the horse's ears moving. What strange creatures those ears were ! They moved in every direction—to right and left ; they hitched forward, and fell to one side, and turned backwards in such a ridiculous way that he burst out laughing. He would pinch his grandfather to make him look at them ; but his grandfather was not interested in them. He would repulse Christopher, and tell him to be quiet. Christopher would ponder. He thought that when people grow up they are not surprised by anything, and that when they are strong they know everything ; and he would try to be grown up himself, and to hide his curiosity, and appear to be indifferent.

He was silent then. The rolling of the carriage made him drowsy. The horse's little bells danced—ding, ding ; dong, ding. Music awoke in the air, and hovered about the silvery bells, like a swarm of bees. It beat gaily with the rhythm of the cart—an endless source of song, and one song came on another's heels. To Christopher they were superb. There was one especially which he thought so beautiful that he tried to draw his grandfather's attention to it. He sang it aloud. They took no heed of him. He began it again in a higher key, then again shrilly, and then old Jean Michel said irritably : " Be quiet ; you are deafening

me with your trumpet-call!" That took away his breath. He blushed and was silent and mortified. He crushed with his contempt the two stockish imbeciles who did not understand the sublimity of his song, which opened wide the heavens! He thought them very ugly, with their week-old beards, and they smelled very ill.

He found consolation in watching the horse's shadow. That was an astonishing sight. The beast ran along with them lying on its side. In the evening, when they returned, it covered a part of the field. They came upon a rick, and the shadow's head would rise up and then return to its place when they had passed. Its snout was flattened out like a burst balloon; its ears were large, and pointed like candles. Was it really a shadow or a creature? Christopher would not have liked to encounter it alone. He would not have run after it as he did after his grandfather's shadow, so as to walk on its head and trample it under foot. The shadows of the trees when the sun was low were also objects of meditation. They made barriers along the road, and looked like phantoms, melancholy and grotesque, saying, "Go no farther!" and the creaking axles and the horse's shoes repeated, "No farther!"

Christopher's grandfather and the driver never ceased their endless chatter. Sometimes they would raise their voices, especially when they talked of local affairs or injured interests. The child would cease to dream, and look at them uneasily. It seemed to him that they were angry with each other, and he was afraid that they would come to blows. However, on the contrary, they best understood each other in common hatred. For the most part, they were without

hatred or the least passion ; they talked of small matters loudly, just for the pleasure of talking, as is the joy of the people. But Christopher, not understanding their conversation, only heard the loud tones of their voices and saw their agitated faces, and thought fearfully : " How wicked he looks ! Surely they hate each other ! How he rolls his eyes, and how wide he opens his mouth ! He spat on my nose in his fury. O Lord, he will kill my grandfather ! . . . "

The carriage stopped. The peasant said : " Here you are. " The two deadly enemies shook hands. Christopher's grandfather got down first ; the peasant handed him the little boy. The whip flicked the horse, the carriage rolled away, and there they were by the little sunken road near the Rhine. The sun dipped down below the fields. The path wound almost to the water's edge. The plentiful soft grass yielded under their feet, crackling. Alder-trees leaned over the river, almost half in the water. A cloud of gnats danced. A boat passed noiselessly, drawn on by the peaceful current, striding along. The water sucked the branches of the willows with a little noise of the lips. The light was soft and misty, the air fresh, the river silvery grey. They reached their home, and the crickets chirped, and on the threshold smiled his mother's dear face. . . .

Oh, delightful memories, kindly visions, which will hum their melody in their tuneful flight through life ! . . . Journeys in later life, great towns and moving seas, dream countries and loved faces, are not so exactly graven in the soul as these childish walks, or the corner of the garden seen every day through the window, through the steam and mist made by the child's mouth glued to it for want of other occupation. . . .

Evening now, and the house is shut up. Home . . . the refuge from all terrifying things—darkness, night, fear, things unknown. No enemy can pass the threshold. . . . The fire flares. A golden duck turns slowly on the spit; a delicious smell of fat and of crisping flesh scents the room. The joy of eating, incomparable delight, a religious enthusiasm, thrills of joy! The body is too languid with the soft warmth, and the fatigues of the day, and the familiar voices. The act of digestion plunges it in ecstasy, and faces, shadows, the lamp-shade, the tongues of flame dancing with a shower of stars in the fireplace—all take on a magical appearance of delight. Christopher lays his cheek on his plate, the better to enjoy all this happiness. . . .

He is in his soft bed. How did he come there? He is overcome with weariness. The buzzing of the voices in the room and the visions of the day are intermingled in his mind. His father takes his violin; the shrill sweet sounds cry out complaining in the night. But the crowning joy is when his mother comes and takes Christopher's hands. He is drowsy, and, leaning over him, in a low voice she sings, as he asks, an old song with words that have no meaning. His father thinks such music stupid, but Christopher never wearies of it. He holds his breath, and is between laughing and crying. His heart is intoxicated. He does not know where he is, and he is overflowing with tenderness. He throws his little arms round his mother's neck, and hugs her with all his strength. She says, laughing:

“You want to strangle me?”

He hugs her close. How he loves her! How he loves everything! Everybody, everything! All is

good, all is beautiful. . . . He sleeps. The cricket on the hearth cheeps. His grandfather's tales, the great heroes, float by in the happy night. . . . To be a hero like them ! . . . Yes, he will be that . . . he is that. . . . Ah, how good it is to live !

What an abundance of strength, joy, pride, is in that little creature ! What superfluous energy ! His body and mind never cease to move ; they are carried round and round breathlessly. Like a little salamander, he dances day and night in the flames. His is an unwearying enthusiasm finding its food in all things. A delicious dream, a bubbling well, a treasure of inexhaustible hope, a laugh, a song, unending drunkenness. Life does not hold him yet ; always he escapes it. He swims in the infinite. How happy he is ! He is made to be happy ! There is nothing in him that does not believe in happiness, and does not cling to it with all his little strength and passion ! . . .

Life will soon see to it that he is brought to reason.

II

L' alba vinceva l'ora mattutina
che fuggia innanzi, sì che di lontano
cenobbi il tremolar della marina. . . .

Purgatorio, i.

THE Kraffts came originally from Antwerp. Old Jean Michel had left the country as a result of a boyish freak, a violent quarrel, such as he had often had, for he was devilish pugnacious, and it had had an unfortunate ending. He settled down, almost fifty years ago, in the little town of the principality, with its red-pointed roofs and shady gardens, lying on the slope of a gentle hill, mirrored in the pale green eyes of *Vater Rhein*. An excellent musician, he had readily gained appreciation in a country of musicians. He had taken root there by marrying, forty years ago, Clara Sartorius, daughter of the Prince's *Kapellmeister*, whose duties he took over. Clara was a placid German with two passions—cooking and music. She had for her husband a veneration only equalled by that which she had for her father. Jean Michel no less admired his wife. They had lived together in perfect amity for fifteen years, and they had four children. Then Clara died, and Jean Michel bemoaned her loss, and then, five months later, married Ottilia Schütz, a girl of twenty, with red cheeks, robust and smiling. After eight years of marriage she also died, but in that time she gave

him seven children—eleven children in all, of whom only one had survived. Although he loved them much, all these bereavements had not shaken his good-humour. The greatest blow had been the death of Ottilia, three years ago, which had come to him at an age when it is difficult to start life again and to make a new home. But after a moment's confusion old Jean Michel had regained his equilibrium, which no misfortune seemed able to disturb.

He was an affectionate man, but health was the strongest thing in him. He had a physical repugnance from sadness, and a need of gaiety, great gaiety, Flemish fashion—an enormous and childish laugh. Whatever might be his grief, he did not drink one drop the less, nor miss one bite at table, and his band never had one day off. Under his direction the Court orchestra won a small celebrity in the Rhine country, where Jean Michel had become legendary by reason of his athletic stature and his outbursts of anger. He could not master them, in spite of all his efforts, for the violent man was at bottom timid and afraid of compromising himself. He loved decorum and feared opinion. But his blood ran away with him. He used to see red, and he used to be the victim of sudden fits of crazy impatience, not only at rehearsals, but at the concerts, where once in the Prince's presence he had hurled a bâton and had stamped about like a man possessed as he apostrophized one of the musicians in a furious and stuttering voice. The Prince was amused, but the artists in question were rancorous against him. In vain did Jean Michel, ashamed of his outburst, try to pass it by immediately in exaggerated obsequiousness. On the next occasion he would break

out again, and as this extreme irritability increased with age, in the end it made his position very difficult. He felt it himself, and one day, when his outbursts had all but caused the whole orchestra to strike, he sent in his resignation. He hoped that in consideration of his services they would make difficulties about accepting it, and would ask him to stay. There was nothing of the kind, and as he was too proud to go back on his offer, he left, broken-hearted, and crying out upon the ingratitude of mankind.

Since that time he had not known how to fill his days. He was more than seventy, but he was still vigorous, and he went on working and going up and down the town from morning to night, giving lessons, and entering into discussions, pronouncing perorations, and entering into everything. He was ingenious, and found all sorts of ways of keeping himself occupied. He began to repair musical instruments ; he invented, experimented, and sometimes discovered improvements. He composed also, and set store by his compositions. He had once written a *Missa Solemnis*, of which he used often to talk, and it was the glory of his family. It had cost him so much trouble that he had all but brought about a congestion of the mind in the writing of it. He tried to persuade himself that it was a work of genius, but he knew perfectly well with what emptiness of thought it had been written, and he dared not look again at the manuscript, because every time he did so he recognized in the phrases that he had thought to be his own rags taken from other authors, painfully pieced together haphazard. It was a great sorrow to him. He had ideas sometimes which he thought admirable. He would run tremblingly to his table.

Could he keep his inspiration this time ? But hardly had he taken pen in hand than he found himself alone in silence, and all his efforts to call to life again the vanished voices ended only in bringing to his ears familiar melodies of Mendelssohn or Brahms.

"There are," says George Sand, "unhappy geniuses who lack the power of expression, and carry down to their graves the unknown region of their thoughts, as a member of that great family of illustrious mutes or stammerers has said—Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire." Old Jean Michel belonged to that family. He was no more successful in expressing himself in music than in words, and he always deceived himself. He would so much have loved to talk, to write, to be a great musician, an eloquent orator ! It was his secret sore. He told no one of it, did not admit it to himself, tried not to think of it ; but he did think of it, in spite of himself, and so there was the seed of death in his soul.

Poor old man ! In nothing did he succeed in being absolutely himself. There were in him so many seeds of beauty and power, but they never put forth fruit ; a profound and touching faith in the dignity of Art and the moral value of life, but it was nearly always translated in an emphatic and ridiculous fashion ; so much noble pride, and in life an almost servile admiration for his superiors ; so lofty a desire for independence, and, in fact, absolute docility ; pretensions to strength of mind, and every conceivable superstition ; a passion for heroism, real courage, and so much timidity !—a nature to stop by the wayside.

Jean Michel had transferred all his ambitions to his son, and at first Melchior had promised to realize them.

From childhood he had shown great musical gifts. He learned with extraordinary facility, and quickly acquired as a violinist a virtuosity which for a long time made him the favourite, almost the idol, of the Court concerts. He played the piano and other instruments pleasantly. He was a fine talker, well, though a little heavily, built, and was of the type which passes in Germany for classic beauty; he had a large brow that expressed nothing, large regular features, and a curled beard—a Jupiter of the banks of the Rhine. Old Jean Michel enjoyed his son's success; he was ecstatic over the virtuoso's *tours de force*, he who had never been able properly to play any instrument. In truth, Melchior would have had no difficulty in expressing what he thought. The trouble was that he did not think; and he did not even bother about it. He had the soul of a mediocre comedian who takes pains with the inflexions of his voice without caring about what they express, and, with anxious vanity, watches their effect on his audience.

The odd thing was that, in spite of his constant anxiety about his stage pose, there was in him, as in Jean Michel, in spite of his timid respect for social conventions, a curious, irregular, unexpected and chaotic quality, which made people say that the Kraffts were a bit crazy. It did not harm him at first; it seemed as though these very eccentricities were the proof of the genius attributed to him; for it is understood among people of common sense that an artist has none. But it was not long before his extravagances were traced to their source—usually the bottle. Nietzsche says that Bacchus is the God of Music, and Melchior's instinct was of the same opinion;

but in his case his god was very ungrateful to him : far from giving him the ideas he lacked, he took away from him the few that he had. After his absurd marriage—absurd in the eyes of the world, and therefore also in his own—he gave himself up to it more and more. He neglected his playing—so secure in his own superiority that very soon he lost it. Other virtuosi arrived to succeed him in public favour. That was bitter to him, but instead of rousing his energy, these rebuffs only discouraged him. He avenged himself by crying down his rivals with his pot-fellows. In his absurd conceit he counted on succeeding his father as musical director : another man was appointed. He thought himself persecuted, and took on the airs of a misunderstood genius. Thanks to the esteem in which old Krafft was held, he kept his place as a violin in the orchestra, but gradually he lost all his lessons in the town. And if this blow struck most at his vanity, it touched his purse even more. For several years the resources of his household had grown less and less, following on various reverses of fortune. After having known plenty, want came, and every day increased. Melchior refused to take notice of it ; he did not spend one penny the less on his toilet or his pleasures.

He was not a bad man, but a half-good man, which is perhaps worse—weak, without spring, without moral strength, but for the rest, in his own opinion, a good father, a good son, a good husband, a good man—and perhaps he was good, if to be so it is enough to possess an easy kindness, which is quickly touched, and that animal affection by which a man loves his kin as a part of himself. It cannot even be said that

he was very egoistic ; he had not personality enough for that. He was nothing. They are a terrible thing in life, these people who are nothing. Like a dead weight thrown into the air, they fall and must fall ; and in their fall they drag with them everything that they have.

It was when the situation of his family had reached its most difficult that little Christopher began to understand what was going on about him.

He was no longer the only child. Melchior gave his wife a child every year, without troubling to think what was to become of it later. Two had died young ; two others were three and four years old. Melchior never bothered about them. Louisa, when she had to go out, left them with Christopher, now six years old.

The charge cost Christopher something, for he had to sacrifice to his duty his splendid afternoons in the fields. But he was proud of being treated as a man, and gravely fulfilled his task. He amused the children as best he could by showing them his games, and he set himself to talk to them as he had heard his mother talking to the baby. Or he would carry them in his arms, one after another, as he had seen her do ; he bent under their weight, and clenched his teeth, and with all his strength clutched his little brother to his breast, so as to prevent his falling. The children always wanted to be carried—they were never tired of it ; and when Christopher could no more, they wept without ceasing. They made him very unhappy, and he was often troubled about them. They were very dirty, and needed maternal attentions. Christopher did not

know what to do. They took advantage of him. Sometimes he wanted to slap them, but he thought, "They are little; they do not know," and, magnanimously, he let them pinch him, and beat him, and tease him. Ernest used to howl for nothing; he used to stamp his feet and roll about in a passion; he was a nervous child, and Louisa had bidden Christopher not to oppose his whims. As for Rodolphe, he was as malicious as a monkey; he always took advantage of Christopher having Ernest in his arms to play all sorts of silly pranks behind his back; he used to break toys, spill water, dirty his frock, and knock the plates over as he rummaged in the cupboard.

And when Louisa returned, instead of praising Christopher, she used to say to him, without scolding him, but with an injured air, as she saw the havoc: "My poor child, you are not very clever!"

Christopher would be mortified, and his heart would grow big within him.

Louisa, who let no opportunity escape of earning a little money, used to go out as cook for exceptional occasions, such as marriages or baptismal feasts. Melchior pretended to know nothing about it—it touched his vanity—but he was not annoyed with her for doing it so long as he did not know. Christopher had as yet no idea of the difficulties of life; he knew no other limit to his will than the will of his parents, and that did not stand much in his way, for they let him grow pretty much as he pleased. His one idea was to grow up so as to be able to do as he liked. He had no conception of obstacles standing in the way at every turn, and he had never the least idea but that

his parents were completely their own masters. It was a shock to his whole being when, for the first time, he perceived that among men there are those who command and those who are commanded, and that his own people were not of the first class ; it was the first crisis of his life.

It happened one afternoon. His mother had dressed him in his cleanest clothes, old clothes given to her which Louisa's ingenuity and patience had turned to account. He went to find her, as they had agreed, at the house in which she was working. He was abashed at the idea of entering alone. A footman was swaggering in the porch ; he stopped the boy, and asked him patronizingly what he wanted. Christopher blushed, and murmured that he had come to see "Frau Krafft"—as he had been told to say.

"Frau Krafft ? What do you want with Frau Krafft ?" asked the footman, ironically emphasizing the word *Frau*. "Your mother ? Go down there. You will find Louisa in the kitchen at the end of the passage."

He went, growing redder and redder. He was ashamed to hear his mother called familiarly *Louisa*. He was humiliated ; he would have liked to run away down to his dear river, and the shelter of the brush-wood where he used to tell himself stories.

In the kitchen he came upon a number of other servants, who greeted him with noisy exclamations. At the back, near the stove, his mother smiled at him with tender embarrassment. He ran to her, and clung to her skirts. She was wearing a white apron, and holding a wooden spoon. She made him more unhappy by trying to raise his chin so as to look in his

face, and to make him hold out his hand to everybody there and say good-day to them. He would not ; he turned to the wall and hid his face in his arms. Then gradually he gained courage, and peeped out of his hiding-place with merry bright eyes, which hid again every time anyone looked at him. He stole looks at the people there. His mother looked busy and important, and he did not know her like that ; she went from one saucepan to another, tasting, giving advice, in a sure voice explaining recipes, and the cook of the house listened respectfully. The boy's heart swelled with pride as he saw how much his mother was appreciated, and the great part that she played in this splendid room, adorned with magnificent objects of gold and silver.

Suddenly conversation ceased. The door opened. A lady entered with a rustling of the stuffs she was wearing. She cast a suspicious look about her. She was no longer young, and yet she was wearing a light dress with wide sleeves. She caught up her dress in her hand, so as not to brush against anything. It did not prevent her going to the stove and looking at the dishes, and even tasting them. When she raised her hand a little her sleeve fell back, and her arm was bare to the elbow. Christopher thought this ugly and improper. How dryly and abruptly she spoke to Louisa ! And how humbly Louisa replied ! Christopher hated it. He hid away in his corner, so as not to be observed, but it was no use. The lady asked who the little boy might be. Louisa fetched him and presented him ; she held his hands to prevent his hiding his face. And, though he wanted to break away and flee, Christopher felt instinctively that this time he

must not resist. The lady looked at the boy's scared face, and at first she gave him a kindly, motherly smile. But then she resumed her patronizing air, and asked him about his behaviour, and his piety, and put questions to him, to which he did not reply. She looked to see how his clothes fitted him, and Louisa eagerly declared that they were magnificent. She pulled down his waistcoat to remove the creases. Christopher wanted to cry, it fitted so tightly. He did not understand why his mother was giving thanks.

The lady took him by the hand and said that she would take him to her own children. Christopher cast a look of despair at his mother ; but she smiled at her mistress so eagerly that he saw that there was nothing to hope for from her, and he followed his guide like a sheep that is led to the slaughter.

They came to a garden, where two cross-looking children, a boy and a girl, about the same age as Christopher, were apparently sulky with each other. Christopher's advent created a diversion. They came up to examine the new arrival. Christopher, left with the children by the lady, stood stock still in a pathway, not daring to raise his eyes. The two others stood motionless a short distance away, and looked him up and down, nudged each other, and tittered. Finally, they made up their minds. They asked him who he was, whence he came, and what his father did. Christopher, turned to stone, made no reply ; he was terrified almost to the point of tears, especially of the little girl, who had fair hair in plaits, a short skirt, and bare
gs.

They began to play. Just as Christopher was begin-

ning to be a little happier, the little boy stopped dead in front of him, and, touching his coat, said :

“Hullo ! That’s mine !”

Christopher did not understand. Furious at this assertion that his coat belonged to someone else, he shook his head violently in denial.

“I know it all right,” said the boy. “It is my old blue waistcoat. There is a spot on it.”

And he put his finger on the spot. Then, going on with his inspection, he examined Christopher’s feet, and asked what his mended-up shoes were made of. Christopher grew crimson. The little girl pouted and whispered to her brother—Christopher heard it—that it was a little poor boy. Christopher resented the word. He thought he would succeed in combating the insulting opinions as he stammered in a choking voice that he was the son of Melchior Krafft, and that his mother was Louisa the cook. It seemed to him that this title was as good as any other, and he was right. But the two children, interested in the news, did not seem to esteem him any the more for it. On the contrary, they took on a patronizing tone. They asked him what he was going to be—a cook or a coachman. Christopher revolted. He felt an iciness steal into his heart.

Encouraged by his silence, the two rich children, who had conceived for the little poor boy one of those cruel and unreasoning antipathies which children have, tried various amusing ways of tormenting him. The little girl especially was implacable. She observed that Christopher could hardly run, because his clothes were so tight, and she conceived the subtle idea of making him jump. They made an obstacle of little

seats, and insisted on Christopher clearing it. The wretched child dared not say what it was that prevented his jumping. He gathered himself together, hurled himself through the air, and measured his length on the ground. They roared with laughter at him. He had to try again. Tears in his eyes, he made a desperate attempt, and this time succeeded in jumping. That did not satisfy his tormentors, who decided that the obstacle was not high enough, and they built it up until it became a regular break-neck affair. Christopher tried to rebel, and declared that he would not jump. Then the little girl called him a coward, and said that he was afraid. Christopher could not stand that, and, knowing that he must fall, he jumped, and fell. His feet caught in the obstacle ; the whole thing toppled over with him. He grazed his hands and almost broke his head, and, as a crowning misfortune, his trousers tore at the knees and elsewhere. He was sick with shame ; he heard the two children dancing with delight round him ; he suffered horribly. He felt that they despised and hated him. Why ? Why ? He would gladly have died ! There is no more cruel suffering than that of a child who discovers for the first time the wickedness of others ; he believes then that he is persecuted by the whole world, and there is nothing to support him ; there is nothing then—nothing ! . . . Christopher tried to get up ; the little boy pushed him down again ; the little girl kicked him. He tried again, and they both jumped on him, and sat on his back and pressed his face down into the ground. Then rage seized him—it was too much. His hands were bruised, his fine coat was torn—a catastrophe for him !—shame, pain, revolt

against the injustice of it, so many misfortunes all at once, plunged him in blind fury. He rose to his hands and knees, shook himself like a dog, and rolled his tormentors over ; and when they returned to the assault he butted at them, head down, bowled over the little girl, and, with one blow of his fist, hurled the boy into the middle of a flower-bed.

They howled. The children ran into the house with piercing cries. Doors slammed, and cries of anger were heard. The lady ran out as quickly as her long dress would let her. Christopher saw her coming, and made no attempt to escape. He was terrified at what he had done ; it was a thing unheard of, a crime ; but he regretted nothing. He waited. He was lost. So much the better ! He was reduced to despair.

The lady pounced on him. He felt her beat him. He heard her talking in a furious voice, a flood of words ; but he could distinguish nothing. His little enemies had come back to see his shame, and screamed shrilly. There were servants—a babel of voices. To complete his downfall, Louisa, who had been summoned, appeared, and, instead of defending him, she began to scold him—she, too, without knowing anything—and bade him beg pardon. He refused angrily. She shook him, and dragged him by the hand to the lady and the children, and bade him go on his knees. But he stamped and roared, and bit his mother's hand. Finally, he escaped among the servants, who laughed.

He went away, his heart beating furiously, his face burning with anger and the slaps which he had received. He tried not to think, and he hurried along because he did not want to cry in the street. He wanted to be at home, so as to be able to find the comfort of tears.

He choked ; the blood beat in his head ; he was at bursting-point.

Finally, he arrived ; he ran up the old black staircase to his usual nook in the bay of a window above the river ; he hurled himself into it breathlessly, and then there came a flood of tears. He did not know exactly why he was crying, but he had to cry ; and when the first flood of them was done, he wept again because he wanted to, with a sort of rage, to make himself suffer, as if he could in this way punish the others as well as himself. Then he thought that his father must be coming home, and that his mother would tell him everything, and that his miseries were by no means at an end. He resolved on flight, no matter whither, never to return.

Just as he was going downstairs he bumped into his father, who was coming up.

“What are you doing, boy ? Where are you going ?” asked Melchior.

He did not reply.

“You are up to some folly. What have you done ?”

Christopher held his peace.

“What have you done ?” repeated Melchior. “Will you answer ?”

The boy began to cry and Melchior to shout, vying with each other until they heard Louisa hurriedly coming up the stairs. She arrived, still upset. She began with violent reproach and further chastisement, in which Melchior joined as soon as he understood—and probably before—with blows that would have felled an ox. Both shouted ; the boy roared. They ended by angry argument. All the time that he was beating his son Melchior maintained that he was right, and that

this was the sort of thing that one came by, by going out to service with people who thought they could do everything because they had money ; and as she beat the child Louisa shouted that her husband was a brute, that she would never let him touch the boy, and that he had really hurt him. Christopher was, in fact, bleeding a little from the nose, but he hardly gave a thought to it, and he was not in the least thankful to his mother for stopping it with a wet cloth, since she went on scolding him. In the end they pushed him away in a dark closet, and shut him up without any supper.

He heard them shouting at each other, and he did not know which of them he detested most. He thought it must be his mother, for he had never expected any such wickedness from her. All the misfortunes of the day overwhelmed him : all that he had suffered—the injustice of the children, the injustice of the lady, the injustice of his parents, and—this he felt like an open wound, without quite knowing why—the degradation of his parents, of whom he was so proud, before these evil and contemptible people. Such cowardice, of which for the first time he had become vaguely conscious, seemed ignoble to him. Everything was upset for him—his admiration for his own people, the religious respect with which they inspired him, his confidence in life, the simple need that he had of loving others and of being loved, his moral faith, blind but absolute. It was a complete downfall. He was crushed by brute force, without any means of defending himself or of ever again escaping. He choked. He thought himself on the point of death. All his body stiffened in desperate revolt. He beat with fists, feet, head,

against the wall, howled, was seized with convulsions, and fell to the floor, hurting himself against the furniture.

His parents, running up, took him in their arms. They vied with each other now as to who should be the more tender with him. His mother undressed him, carried him to his bed, and sat by him and remained with him until he was calmer. But he did not yield one inch. He forgave her nothing, and pretended to be asleep to get rid of her. His mother seemed to him bad and cowardly. He had no suspicion of all the suffering that she had to go through in order to live and give a living to her family, and of what she had borne in taking sides against him.

After he had exhausted to the last drop the incredible store of tears that is in the eyes of a child, he felt somewhat comforted. He was tired and worn out, but his nerves were too much on stretch for him to sleep. The visions that had been with him floated before him again in his semi-torpor. Especially he saw again the little girl with her bright eyes and her turned-up, disdainful little nose, her hair hanging down to her shoulders, her bare legs and her childish, affected way of talking. He trembled, as it seemed to him that he could hear her voice. He remembered how stupid he had been with her, and he conceived a savage hatred for her. He did not pardon her for having brought him low, and was consumed with the desire to humiliate her and to make her weep. He sought means of doing this, but found none. There was no sign of her ever caring about him. But by way of consoling himself he supposed that everything was as he wished it to be. He supposed that he had become very powerful and

famous, and decided that she was in love with him. Then he began to tell himself one of those absurd stories which in the end he would regard as more real than reality.

She was dying of love, but he spurned her. When he passed before her house she watched him pass, hiding behind the curtains, and he knew that she watched him, but he pretended to take no notice, and talked gaily. Even he left the country, and journeyed far to add to her anguish. He did great things. Here he introduced into his narrative fragments chosen from his grandfather's heroic tales, and all this time she was falling ill of grief. Her mother, that proud dame, came to beg of him: "My poor child is dying. I beg you to come!" He went. She was in her bed. Her face was pale and sunken. She held out her arms to him. She could not speak, but she took his hands and kissed them as she wept. Then he looked at her with marvellous kindness and tenderness. He bade her recover, and consented to let her love him. At this point of the story, when he amused himself by drawing out the coming together by repeating their gestures and words several times, sleep overcame him, and he slept and was consoled.

But when he opened his eyes it was day, and it no longer shone so lightly or so carelessly as its predecessor. There was a great change in the world. Christopher now knew the meaning of injustice.

There were now times of extremely straitened circumstances at home. They became more and more frequent. They lived meagrely then. No one was more sensible of it than Christopher. His father saw

nothing. He was served first, and there was always enough for him. He talked noisily, and roared with laughter at his own jokes, and he never noticed his wife's glances as she gave a forced laugh, while she watched him helping himself. When he passed the dish it was more than half empty. Louisa helped the children—two potatoes each. When it came to Christopher's turn there were sometimes only three left, and his mother was not helped. He knew that beforehand; he had counted them before they came to him. Then he summoned up courage, and said carelessly :

“Only one, mother.”

She was a little put out.

“Two, like the others.”

“No, please; only one.”

“Aren't you hungry?”

“No, I'm not very hungry.”

But she, too, only took one, and they peeled them carefully, cut them up in little pieces, and tried to eat them as slowly as possible. His mother watched him. When he had finished :

“Come, take it!”

“No, mother.”

“But you are ill?”

“I am not ill, but I have eaten enough.”

Then his father would reproach him with being obstinate, and take the last potato for himself. But Christopher learned that trick, and he used to keep it on his plate for Ernest, his little brother, who was always hungry, and watched him out of the corner of his eyes from the beginning of dinner, and ended by asking :

“Aren’t you going to eat it? Give it me, then, Christopher.”

Oh, how Christopher detested his father, how he hated him for not thinking of them, or for not even dreaming that he was eating their share! He was so hungry that he hated him, and would gladly have told him so; but he thought in his pride that he had no right, since he could not earn his own living. His father had earned the bread that he took. He himself was good for nothing; he was a burden on everybody; he had no right to talk. Later on he would talk—if there were any later on. Oh, he would die of hunger first! . . .

He suffered more than another child would have done from these cruel fasts. His robust stomach was in agony. Sometimes he trembled because of it; his head ached. There was a hole in his chest—a hole which turned and widened, like a gimlet being twisted. But he did not complain. He felt his mother’s eyes upon him, and assumed an expression of indifference. Louisa, with a clutching at her heart, understood vaguely that her little boy was denying himself so that the others might have more. She rejected the idea, but always returned to it. She dared not investigate it or ask Christopher if it were true, for, if it were true, what could she have done? She had been used to privation since her childhood. What is the use of complaining when there is nothing to be done? She never suspected, indeed—she, with her frail health and small needs—that the boy might suffer more than herself. She did not say anything, but once or twice, when the others were gone, the children to the street, Melchior about his business, she asked her eldest son to

stay to do her some small service. Christopher would hold her skein while she unwound it. Suddenly she would throw everything away, and draw him passionately to her. She would take him on her knees, although he was quite heavy, and would hug and hug him. He would fling his arms round her neck, and the two of them would weep desperately, embracing each other.

“My poor little boy ! . . .”

“Mother, mother ! . . .”

They said no more, but they understood each other.

It was some time before Christopher realized that his father drank. Melchior's intemperance did not—at least, in the beginning—exceed certain limits. It was not brutish. It showed itself rather by wild outbursts of happiness. He used to make foolish remarks, and sing loudly for hours together as he drummed on the table, and sometimes he insisted on dancing with Louisa and the children. Christopher saw that his mother looked sad. She would return and bend her face over her work ; she avoided the drunkard's eyes, and used to try gently to quiet him when he said coarse things that made her blush. But Christopher did not understand, and he was in such need of gaiety that these noisy home-comings of his father's were almost a festival to him. The house was melancholy, and these follies were a relaxation for him. He used to laugh heartily at Melchior's crazy antics and stupid jokes ; he sang and danced with him ; and he was put out when his mother in an angry voice ordered him to cease. How could it be wrong, since his father did it ?

Although his ever waking observation, which never forgot anything it had seen, told him that there were in his father's behaviour several things which did not accord with his childish and imperious sense of justice, yet he continued to admire him. A child has so much need of an object of admiration! Doubtless it is one of the eternal forms of self-love. When a man is, or knows himself to be, too weak to accomplish his desires and satisfy his pride, as a child he transfers them to his parents, or, as a man who has failed, he transfers them to his children. They are, or shall be, all that he dreamed of being—his champions, his avengers—and in this proud abdication in their favour love and egoism are mingled so forcefully and yet so gently as to bring him to keen delight. Christopher forgot all his grudges against his father, and cast about to find reasons for admiring him. He admired his figure, his strong arms, his voice, his laugh, his gaiety, and he shone with pride when he heard praise of his father's talents as a virtuoso, or when Melchior himself recited with some amplification the eulogies he had received. He believed in his father's boasts, and looked upon him as a genius, as one of his grandfather's heroes.

One evening about seven o'clock he was alone in the house. His little brothers had gone out with Jean Michel. Louisa was washing the linen in the river. The door opened, and Melchior plunged in. He was hatless and dishevelled. He cut a sort of caper to cross the threshold, and then plumped down in a chair by the table. Christopher began to laugh, thinking it was a part of one of the usual buffooneries, and he approached him. But as soon as he looked more closely at him the desire to laugh left him. Melchior

sat there with his arms hanging, and looking straight in front of him, seeing nothing, with his eyes blinking: His face was crimson, his mouth was open, and from it there gurgled every now and then a silly laugh. Christopher stood stock still. He thought at first that his father was joking, but when he saw that he did not budge he was panic-stricken.

"Papa, papa!" he cried.

Melchior went on gobbling like a fowl. Christopher took him by the arm in despair, and shook him with all his strength.

"Papa, dear papa, answer me, please, please!"

Melchior's body shook like a boneless thing, and all but fell. His head flopped towards Christopher; he looked at him and babbled incoherently and irritably. When Christopher's eyes met those clouded eyes he was seized with panic terror. He ran away to the other end of the room, and threw himself on his knees by the bed, and buried his face in the clothes. He remained so for some time. Melchior swung heavily on the chair, sniggering. Christopher stopped his ears, so as not to hear him, and trembled. What was happening inside him was inexpressible. It was a terrible upheaval—terror, sorrow, as though for someone dead, someone dear and honoured.

No one came; they were left alone. Night fell, and Christopher's fear grew as the minutes passed. He could not help listening, and his blood froze as he heard the voice that he did not recognize. The silence made it all the more terrifying; the limping clock beat time for the senseless babbling. He could bear it no longer; he wished to fly. But he had to pass his father to get out, and Christopher shuddered at the

idea of seeing those eyes again ; it seemed to him that he must die if he did so. He tried to creep on hands and knees to the door of the room. He could not breathe ; he would not look ; he stopped at the least movement from Melchior, whose feet he could see under the table. One of the drunken man's legs trembled. Christopher reached the door. With one trembling hand he pushed the handle, but in his terror he let go. It shut to again. Melchior turned to look. The chair on which he was balanced toppled over ; he fell down with a crash. Christopher in his terror had no strength left for flight. He remained glued to the wall, looking at his father stretched there at his feet, and he cried for help.

His fall sobered Melchior a little. He cursed and swore, and thumped on the chair that had played him such a trick. He tried vainly to get up, and then did manage to sit up with his back resting against the table, and he recognized the surrounding country. He saw Christopher crying ; he called him. Christopher wanted to run away ; he could not stir. Melchior called him again, and as the child did not come he swore angrily. Christopher went near him, trembling in every limb. Melchior drew the boy near him, and made him sit on his knees. He began by pulling his ears, and in a thick, stuttering voice delivered a homily on the respect due from a son to his father. Then he went off suddenly on a new train of thought, and made him jump in his arms while he rattled off silly jokes. He wriggled with laughter. From that he passed immediately to melancholy ideas. He commiserated the boy and himself ; he hugged him so that he was like to choke, covered him with kisses and tears, and

finally rocked him in his arms, intoning the *De Profundis*. Christopher made no effort to break loose; he was frozen with horror. Stified against his father's bosom, feeling his breath hiccoughing and smelling of wine upon his face, wet with his kisses and repulsive tears, he was in an agony of fear and disgust. He would have screamed, but no sound would come from his lips. He remained in this horrible condition for an age, as it seemed to him, until the door opened, and Louisa came in with a basket of linen on her hand. She gave a cry, let the basket fall, rushed at Christopher, and with a violence which seemed incredible in her she wrenched Melchior's arm, crying :

“Drunken, drunken wretch !”

Her eyes flashed with anger.

Christopher thought his father was going to kill her. But Melchior was so startled by the threatening appearance of his wife that he made no reply, and began to weep. He rolled on the floor; he beat his head against the furniture, and said that she was right, that he was a drunkard, that he brought misery upon his family, and was ruining his poor children, and wished he were dead. Louisa had contemptuously turned her back on him. She carried Christopher into the next room, and caressed him and tried to comfort him. The boy went on trembling, and did not answer his mother's questions; then he burst out sobbing. Louisa bathed his face with water. She kissed him, and used tender words, and wept with him. In the end they were both comforted. She knelt, and made him kneel by her side. They prayed to God to cure father of his disgusting habit, and make him the kind, good man that he used to be. Louisa put the child to bed. He

wanted her to stay by his bedside and hold his hand. Louisa spent part of the night sitting on Christopher's bed. He was feverish. The drunken man snored on the floor.

Some time after that, one day at school, when Christopher was spending his time watching the flies on the ceiling, and thumping his neighbours, to make them fall off the form, the schoolmaster, who had taken a dislike to him, because he was always fidgeting and laughing, and would never learn anything, made an unhappy allusion. Christopher had fallen down himself, and the schoolmaster said he seemed to be like to follow brilliantly in the footsteps of a certain well-known person. All the boys burst out laughing, and some of them took upon themselves to point the allusion with comment both lucid and vigorous. Christopher got up, livid with shame, seized his ink-pot, and hurled it with all his strength at the nearest boy whom he saw laughing. The schoolmaster fell on him and beat him. He was thrashed, made to kneel, and set to do an enormous imposition.

He went home, pale and storming, though he said never a word. He declared frigidly that he would not go to school again. They paid no attention to what he said. Next morning, when his mother reminded him that it was time to go, he replied quietly that he had said that he was not going any more. In vain Louisa begged and screamed and threatened; it was no use. He stayed sitting in his corner, obstinate. Melchior thrashed him. He howled, but every time they bade him go after the thrashing was over he replied angrily, "No!" They asked him at least to say why. He clenched his teeth, and would not.

Melchior took hold of him, carried him to school, and gave him into the master's charge. They set him on his form, and he began methodically to break everything within reach—his inkstand, his pen. He tore up his copy-book and lesson-book, all quite openly, with his eye on the schoolmaster, provocative. They shut him up in a dark room. A few moments later the schoolmaster found him with his handkerchief tied round his neck, tugging with all his strength at the two ends of it. He was trying to strangle himself.

They had to send him back.

Christopher was impervious to sickness. He had inherited from his father and grandfather their robust constitution. They were not mollicoddles in that family; well or ill, they never worried, and nothing could bring about any change in the habits of the two Kraffts, father and son. They went out winter and summer, in all weathers, and stayed for hours together out in rain or sun, sometimes bareheaded and with their coats open, from carelessness or bravado, and walked for miles without being tired, and they looked with pity and disdain upon poor Louisa, who never said anything, but had to stop. She would go pale, and her legs would swell, and her heart would thump. Christopher was not far from sharing the scorn of his mother; he did not understand people being ill. When he fell, or knocked himself, or cut himself, or burned himself, he did not cry; but he was angry with the thing that had injured him. His father's brutalities and the roughness of his little playmates, the urchins of the street, with whom he used to fight, hardened him. He was not afraid of blows, and more than once

he returned home with bleeding nose and bruised forehead. One day he had to be wrenched away, almost suffocated, from one of these fierce tussles in which he had bowled over his adversary, who was savagely banging his head on the ground. That seemed natural enough to him, for he was prepared to do unto others as they did unto himself.

And yet he was afraid of all sorts of things, and although no one knew it—for he was very proud—nothing brought him so much suffering during a part of his childhood as these same terrors. For two or three years especially they gnawed at him like a disease.

He was afraid of the mysterious something that lurks in darkness—evil powers that seemed to lie in wait for his life, the roaring of monsters which fearfully haunt the mind of every child and appear in everything that he sees, the relic perhaps of a form long dead, hallucinations of the first days after emerging from chaos, from the fearful slumber in his mother's womb, from the awakening of the larva from the depths of matter.

He was afraid of the garret door. It opened on to the stairs, and was almost always ajar. When he had to pass it he felt his heart beating; he would spring forward and jump by it without looking. It seemed to him that there was someone or something behind it. When it was closed he heard distinctly something moving behind it. That was not surprising, for there were large rats; but he imagined a monster, with rattling bones, and flesh hanging in rags, a horse's head, horrible and terrifying eyes, shapeless. He did not want to think of it, but did so in spite of

himself. With trembling hand he would make sure that the door was locked ; but that did not keep him from turning round ten times as he went downstairs.

He was afraid of the night outside. Sometimes he used to stay late with his grandfather, or was sent there in the evening on some errand. Old Krafft lived a little outside the town in the last house on the Cologne road. Between the house and the first lighted windows of the town there was a distance of two or three hundred yards, which seemed three times as long to Christopher. There were places where the road twisted and it was impossible to see anything. The country was deserted in the evening, the earth grew black, and the sky was awfully pale. When he came out from the hedges that lined the road and climbed up the slope, he could still see a yellowish light on the horizon, but it gave no light, and was more oppressive than the night ; it made the darkness only darker ; it was a deathly light. The clouds came down almost to earth. The hedges grew enormous and moved. The gaunt trees were like grotesque old men. The sides of the wood were stark white. The darkness moved. There were dwarfs sitting in the ditches, lights in the grass, fearful flying things in the air, shrill cries of insects coming from nowhere. Christopher was always in anguish, expecting some fearsome or strange putting forth of Nature. He would run, with his heart leaping in his bosom.

When he saw the light in his grandfather's room he would gain confidence. But worst of all was when old Krafft was not at home. That was most terrifying. The old house, lost in the country, frightened the boy

even in daylight. He forgot his fears when his grandfather was there, but sometimes the old man would leave him alone, and go out without warning him. Christopher did not mind that. The room was quiet. Everything in it was familiar and kindly. There was a great white wooden bedstead, by the bedside was a great Bible on a shelf, artificial flowers were on the mantelpiece, with photographs of the old man's two wives and eleven children—and at the bottom of each photograph he had written the date of birth and death—on the walls were framed texts and vile chromolithographs of Mozart and Beethoven. A little piano stood in one corner, a great violoncello in another; rows of books higgledy-piggledy, pipes, and in the window pots of geraniums. It was like being surrounded with friends. The old man could be heard moving about in the next room, and planing or hammering, and talking to himself, calling himself an idiot, or singing in a loud voice, improvising a pot-pourri of scraps of chants and sentimental *Lieder*, warlike marches, and drinking songs. Here was shelter and refuge. Christopher would sit in the great arm-chair by the window with a book on his knees, bending over the pictures and losing himself in them. The day would die down, his eyes would grow weary, and then he would look no more, and fall into vague dreaming. The wheels of a cart would rumble by along the road, a cow would moo in the fields; the bells of the town, weary and sleepy, would ring the evening Angelus. Vague desires, happy presentiments, would awake in the heart of the dreaming child.

Suddenly Christopher would awake, filled with dull uneasiness. He would raise his eyes—night! He

would listen—silence ! His grandfather had just gone out. He shuddered. He leaned out of the window to try to see him. The road was deserted ; things began to take on a threatening aspect. Oh God ! If *that* should be coming ! What ? He could not tell. The fearful thing. The doors were not properly shut. The wooden stairs creaked as under a footstep. The boy leaped up, dragged the armchair, the two chairs, and the table to the most remote corner of the room ; he made a barrier of them ; the armchair against the wall, a chair to the right, a chair to the left, and the table in front of him. In the middle he planted a pair of steps, and, perched on top with his book and other books, like provisions in case of siege, he breathed again, having decided in his childish imagination that the enemy could not pass the barrier—that was not allowed.

But the enemy would creep forth even from his book. Among the old books which the old man had picked up were some with pictures which made a profound impression on the child : they attracted and yet terrified him. There were fantastic visions—temptations of St. Anthony—in which skeletons of birds stink in bottles, and thousands of eggs writhe like worms in disembowelled frogs, and heads walk on feet, and household utensils and corpses of animals walk gravely, wrapped in great cloths, bowing like old ladies. Christopher was horrified by them, but always returned to them, drawn on by disgust. He would look at them for a long time, and every now and then look furtively about him to see what was stirring in the folds of the curtains. A picture of a flayed man in an anatomy book was still more

horrible to him. He trembled as he turned the page when he came to the place where it was in the book. This shapeless medley was grimly etched for him. The creative power inherent in every child's mind filled out the meagreness of the setting of them. He saw no difference between the daubs and the reality. At night they had an even more powerful influence over his dreams than the living things that he saw during the day.

He was afraid to sleep. For several years nightmares poisoned his rest. He wandered in cellars, and through the manhole saw the grinning flayed man entering. He was alone in a room, and he heard a stealthy footstep in the corridor ; he hurled himself against the door to close it, and was just in time to hold the handle ; but it was turned from the outside ; he could not turn the key, his strength left him, and he cried for help. He was with his family, and suddenly their faces changed ; they did crazy things. He was reading quietly, and he felt that an invisible being was all *round* him. He tried to fly, but felt himself bound. He tried to cry out, but he was gagged. A loathsome grip was about his neck. He awoke, suffocating, and with his teeth chattering ; and he went on trembling long after he was awake ; he could not be rid of his agony.

The room in which he slept was a hole without door or windows ; an old curtain hung up by a curtain-rod over the entrance was all that separated it from the room of his father and mother. The thick air stifled him. His brother, who slept in the same bed, used to kick him. His head burned, and he was a prey to a sort of hallucination in which all the little troubles of the

day reappeared infinitely magnified. In this state of nervous tension, bordering on delirium, the least shock was an agony to him. The creaking of a plank terrified him. His father's breathing took on fantastic proportions. It seemed to be no longer a human breathing, and the monstrous sound was horrible to him ; it seemed to him that there must be a beast sleeping there. The night crushed him ; it would never end ; it must always be so ; he was lying there for months and months. He gasped for breath ; he half raised himself on his bed, sat up, dried his sweating face with his shirt-sleeve. Sometimes he nudged his brother Rodolphe to wake him up ; but Rodolphe moaned, drew away from him the rest of the bedclothes, and went on sleeping.

So he stayed in feverish agony until a pale beam of light appeared on the floor below the curtain. This timorous paleness of the distant dawn suddenly brought him peace. He felt the light gliding into the room when it was still impossible to distinguish it from darkness. Then his fever would die down, his blood would grow calm, like a flooded river returning to its bed ; an even warmth would flow through all his body, and his eyes, burning from sleeplessness, would close in spite of himself.

In the evening it was terrible to him to see the approach of the hour of sleep. He vowed that he would not give way to it, to watch the whole night through, fearing his nightmares. But in the end weariness always overcame him, and it was always when he was least on his guard that the monsters returned.

Fearful night ! So sweet to most children, so terrible to some ! . . . He was afraid to sleep. He was

afraid of not sleeping. Waking or sleeping, he was surrounded by monstrous shapes, the phantoms of his own brain, the larvæ floating in the half-day and twilight of childhood, as in the dark chiaroscuro of sickness.

But these fancied terrors were soon to be blotted out in the great Fear—that which is in the hearts of all men; that Fear which Wisdom does in vain preen itself on forgetting or denying—Death.

One day when he was rummaging in a cupboard he came upon several things that he did not know—a child's frock and a striped bonnet. He took them in triumph to his mother, who, instead of smiling at him, looked vexed, and bade him take them back to the place where he had found them. When he hesitated to obey, and asked her why, she snatched them from him without reply, and put them on a shelf where he could not reach them. Roused to curiosity, he plied her with questions. At last she told him that there had been a little brother who had died before he came into the world. He was taken aback—he had never heard tell of him. He was silent for a moment, and then tried to find out more. His mother seemed to be lost in thought; but she told him that he was called Christopher like himself, but was more sensible. He put more questions to her, but she would not reply readily. She told him only that he was in Heaven, and was praying for them all. Christopher could get no more out of her; she bade him be quiet, and to let her go on with her work. She seemed to be absorbed in her sewing; she looked anxious, and did not raise her eyes. But after some time she looked

at him where he was in the corner, whither he had retired to sulk, began to smile, and told him to go and play outside.

These scraps of conversation profoundly agitated Christopher. There had been a child, a little boy, belonging to his mother, like himself, bearing the same name, almost exactly the same, and he was dead ! Dead ! He did not exactly know what that was, but it was something terrible. And they never talked of this other Christopher ; he was quite forgotten. It would be the same with him if he were to die ? This thought was with him still in the evening at table with his family, when he saw them all laughing and talking of trifles. So, then, it was possible that they would be gay after he was dead ! Oh ! he never would have believed that his mother could be selfish enough to laugh after the death of her little boy ! He hated them all. He wanted to weep for himself, for his own death, in advance. At the same time he wanted to ask a whole heap of questions, but he dared not ; he remembered the voice in which his mother had bid him be quiet. At last he could contain himself no longer, and one night when he had gone to bed, and Louisa came to kiss him, he asked :

“ Mother, did he sleep in my bed ? ”

The poor woman trembled, and, trying to take on an indifferent tone of voice, she asked :

“ Who ? ”

“ The little boy who is dead,” said Christopher in a whisper.

His mother clutched him with her hands.

“ Be quiet—quiet,” she said.

Her voice trembled. Christopher, whose head was

leaning against her bosom, heard her heart beating. There was a moment of silence, then she said :

"You must never talk of that, my dear. . . . Go to sleep. . . . No, it was not his bed."

She kissed him. He thought he felt her cheek wet against his. He wished he could have been sure of it. He was a little comforted. There was grief in her then ! Then he doubted it again the next moment, when he heard her in the room talking in a quiet, ordinary voice. Which was true—that or what had just been ? He turned about for long in his bed without finding any answer. He wanted his mother to suffer ; not that he also did not suffer in the knowledge that she was sad, but it would have done him so much good, in spite of everything ! He would have felt himself less alone. He slept, and next day thought no more of it.

Some weeks afterwards one of the urchins with whom he played in the street did not come at the usual time. One of them said that he was ill, and they got used to not seeing him in their games. It was explained, it was quite simple. One evening Christopher had gone to bed ; it was early, and from the recess in which his bed was he saw the light in the room. There was a knock at the door. A neighbour had come to have a chat. He listened absently, telling himself stories as usual. The words of their talk did not reach him. Suddenly he heard the neighbour say : "He is dead." His blood stopped, for he had understood who was dead. He listened and held his breath. His parents cried out. Melchior's booming voice said :

"Christopher, do you hear ? Poor Fritz is dead."

Christopher made an effort, and replied quietly :

“ Yes, papa.”

His bosom was drawn tight as in a vice.

Melchior went on :

“ ‘ Yes, papa.’ Is that all you say ? You are not grieved by it.”

Louisa, who understood the child, said :

“ ‘ Ssh ! Let him sleep !’ ”

And they talked in whispers. But Christopher, pricking his ears, gathered all the details of illness—typhoid fever, cold baths, delirium, the parents’ grief. He could not breathe, a lump in his throat choked him. He shuddered. All these horrible things took shape in his mind. Above all, he gleaned that the disease was contagious—that is, that he also might die in the same way—and terror froze him, for he remembered that he had shaken hands with Fritz the last time he had seen him, and that very day had gone past the house. But he made no sound, so as to avoid having to talk, and when his father, after the neighbour had gone, asked him : “ Christopher, are you asleep ? ” he did not reply. He heard Melchior saying to Louisa :

“ The boy has no heart.”

Louisa did not reply, but a moment later she came and gently raised the curtain and looked at the little bed. Christopher only just had time to close his eyes and imitate the regular breathing which his brothers made when they were asleep. Louisa went away on tip-toe. And yet how he wanted to keep her ! How he wanted to tell her that he was afraid, and to ask her to save him, or at least to comfort him ! But he was afraid of their laughing at him, and treating him as a coward ; and besides, he knew only too well that

nothing that they might say would be any good. And for hours he lay there in agony, thinking that he felt the disease creeping over him, and pains in his head, a stricture of the heart, and thinking in terror : " It is the end. I am ill. I am going to die. I am going to die ! " . . . Once he sat up in his bed and called to his mother in a low voice ; but they were asleep, and he dared not wake them.

From that time on his childhood was poisoned by the idea of death. His nerves delivered him up to all sorts of little baseless sicknesses, to depression, to sudden transports, and fits of choking. His imagination ran riot with these troubles, and thought it saw in all of them the murderous beast which was to rob him of his life. How many times he suffered agonies, with his mother sitting only a few yards away from him, and she guessing nothing ! For in his cowardice he was brave enough to conceal all his terror in a strange jumble of feeling—pride in not turning to others, shame of being afraid, and the scrupulousness of a tenderness which forbade him to trouble his mother. But he never ceased to think : " This time I am ill. I am seriously ill. It is diphtheria. . . . " He had chanced on the word " diphtheria. " . . . " Dear God ! not this time ! . . . "

He had religious ideas : he loved to believe what his mother had told him, that after death the soul ascended to the Lord, and if it were pious entered into the garden of paradise. But the idea of this journey rather frightened than attracted him. He was not at all envious of the children whom God, as a recompense, according to his mother, took in their sleep and called to Him without having made them suffer. He

trembled, as he went to sleep, for fear that God should indulge this whimsy at his expense. It must be terrible to be taken suddenly from the warmth of one's bed and dragged through the void into the presence of God. He imagined God as an enormous sun, with a voice of thunder. How it must hurt ! It must burn the eyes, ears—all one's soul ! Then, God could punish—you never know. . . . And besides, that did not prevent all the other horrors which he did not know very well, though he could guess them from what he had heard—your body in a box, all alone at the bottom of a hole, lost in the crowd of those revolting cemeteries to which he was taken to pray. . . . God ! God ! How sad ! how sad ! . . .

And yet it was not exactly joyous to live, and be hungry, and see your father drunk, and to be beaten, to suffer in so many ways from the wickedness of other children, from the insulting pity of grown-up persons, and to be understood by no one, not even by your mother. Everybody humiliates you, no one loves you. You are alone—alone, and matter so little ! Yes ; but it was just this that made him want to live. He felt in himself a surging power of wrath. A strange thing, that power ! It could do nothing yet ; it was as though it were afar off and gagged, swaddled, paralyzed ; he had no idea what it wanted, what, later on, it would be. But it was in him ; he was sure of it ; he felt it stirring and crying out. To-morrow—to-morrow, what a voyage he would take ! He had a savage desire to live, to punish the wicked, to do great things. “ Oh ! but how I will live when I am . . . ” he pondered a little—“ when I am eighteen ! ” Sometimes he put it at twenty-one ; that

was the extreme limit. He thought that was enough for the domination of the world. He thought of the heroes dearest to him—of Napoleon, and of that other more remote hero, whom he preferred, Alexander the Great. Surely he would be like them if only he lived for another twelve—ten years. He never thought of pitying those who died at thirty. They were old ; they had lived their lives ; it was their fault if they had failed. But to die now . . . despair ! Too terrible to pass while yet a little child, and for ever to be in the minds of men a little boy whom everybody thinks he has the right to scold ! He wept with rage at the thought, as though he were already dead.

This agony of death tortured his childish years—corrected only by disgust with life and the sadness of his own life.

It was in the midst of these gloomy shadows of this life, in the stifling night that every moment seemed to intensify about him, that there began to shine, like a star lost in the dark abysm of space, the light which was to illuminate his life : divine music. . . .

His grandfather gave the children an old piano, which one of his clients, anxious to be rid of it, had asked him to take. His patient ingenuity had almost put it in order. The present had not been very well received. Louisa thought her room already too small, without filling it up any more ; and Melchior said that Jean Michel had not ruined himself over it : just firewood. Only Christopher was glad of it without exactly knowing why. It seemed to him a magic box, full of marvellous stories, just like the one in the fairy-book—a volume of the “Thousand and One Nights”—which

his grandfather read to him sometimes to their mutual delight. He had heard his father try it on the day of its arrival, and draw from it a little rain of arpeggios like the drops that a puff of wind shakes from the wet branches of a tree after a shower. He clapped his hands, and cried "Encore!" but Melchior scornfully closed the piano, saying that it was worthless. Christopher did not insist, but thereafter he was always hovering about the instrument, and as soon as no one was near he would raise the lid of it, and softly press down a key, just as if he were moving the green shell of some insect; he wanted to drag out the creature that was locked up in it. Sometimes in his haste he would strike too hard, and then his mother would cry out, "Will you not be quiet? Don't go touching everything!" or else she would pinch his fingers as she shut the box, and he made pitiful faces as he sucked his injured fingers. . . .

Now his greatest joy is when his mother is gone out for a day's service, or to pay some visit in the town. He listens as she goes down the stairs, and into the street, and away. He is alone. He opens the piano, and brings up a chair, and perches on it. His shoulders just about reach the keyboard; it is enough for what he wants. Why does he wait until he is alone? No one would prevent his playing so long as he did not make too much noise. But he is ashamed before the others, and dare not. And then they talk and move about: that spoils his pleasure. It is so much more beautiful when he is alone! Christopher holds his breath so that the silence may be even greater, and also because he is a little excited, as though he were going to let off a gun. His heart beats as he lays his

finger on the key ; sometimes he lifts his finger after he has half thrust the key down, and lays it on another. Does he know what will come out of it, more than what will come out of the other ? Suddenly a sound issues from it ; there are deep sounds and high sounds, some tinkling, some roaring. The child listens to them one by one as they die away, and finally cease to be ; they hover in the air like bells heard far off, coming near in the wind, and then going away again ; then when you listen you hear in the distance other voices, different, joining in and droning like flying insects ; they seem to call to you, to draw you away farther—farther and farther into the mysterious regions, where they dive down and are lost. . . . They are gone ! . . . No ; still they murmur. . . . A little beating of wings. . . . How strange it all is ! They are like spirits. How is it that they are so obedient ? how is it that they are held captive in this old box ? But best of all is when you lay two fingers on two keys at once. Then you never know exactly what will happen. Sometimes the two spirits are hostile ; they are angry with each other, and fight ; and hate each other, and buzz testily. Then voices are raised ; they cry out now angrily, now sorrowfully. Christopher adores that ; it is as though there were monsters chained up, biting at their fetters, beating against the bars of their prison ; they are like to break them, and burst out like the monsters in the fairy-book—the genii imprisoned in the Arab bottles under the seal of Solomon. Others flatter you ; they try to cajole you, but you feel that they only want to bite, that they are hot and fevered. Christopher does not know what they want, but they lure him and disturb him ; they make him almost blush. And

sometimes there are notes that love each other ; sounds embrace, as people do with their arms when they kiss : they are gracious and sweet. These are the good spirits ; their faces are smiling, and there are no lines upon them ; they love little Christopher, and little Christopher loves them. Tears come to his eyes as he hears them, and he is never weary of calling them up. They are his friends, his dear, tender friends. . . .

So the child journeys through the forest of sounds, and round him he is conscious of thousands of forces lying in wait for him, and calling to him to caress or devour him. . . .

One day Melchior came upon him thus. He made him jump with fear at the sound of his great voice. Christopher, thinking he was doing wrong, quickly put his hands up to his ears to ward off the blows he feared. But Melchior did not scold him, strange to say ; he was in a good temper, and laughed.

"You like that, boy ?" he asked, patting his head kindly. "Would you like me to teach you to play it ?"

Would he like ! . . . Delighted, he murmured : "Yes." The two of them sat down at the piano, Christopher perched this time on a pile of big books, and very attentively he took his first lesson. He learned first of all that the buzzing spirits have strange names, like Chinese names, of one syllable, or even of one letter. He was astonished ; he imagined them to be different from that : beautiful, caressing names, like the princesses in the fairy stories. He did not like the familiarity with which his father talked of them. Again, when Melchior evoked them they were not the

same ; they seemed to become indifferent as they rolled out from under his fingers. But Christopher was glad to learn about the relationships between them, their hierarchy, the scales, which were like a King commanding an army, or like a band of negroes marching in single file. He was surprised to see that each soldier, or each negro, could become a monarch in his turn, or the head of a similar band, and that it was possible to summon whole battalions from one end to the other of the keyboard. It amused him to hold the thread which made them march. But it was a small thing compared with what he had seen at first ; his enchanted forest was lost. However, he set himself to learn, for it was not tiresome, and he was surprised at his father's patience. Melchior did not weary of it either ; he made him begin the same thing over again ten times. Christopher did not understand why he should take so much trouble ; his father loved him, then ? That was good ! The boy worked away ; his heart was filled with gratitude.

He would have been less docile had he known what thoughts were springing into being in his father's head.

From that day on Melchior took him to the house of a neighbour, where three times a week there was chamber music. Melchior played first violin, Jean Michel the violoncello. The other two were a bank-clerk and the old watchmaker of the *Schillerstrasse*. Every now and then the chemist joined them with his flute. They began at five, and went on till nine. Between each piece they drank beer. Neighbours used to come in and out, and listen without a word, leaning against the wall, and nodding their heads, and beating time

with their feet, and filling the room with clouds of tobacco-smoke. Page followed page, piece followed piece, but the patience of the musicians was never exhausted. They did not speak ; they were all attention ; their brows were knit, and from time to time they grunted with pleasure, but for the rest they were perfectly incapable not only of expressing, but even of feeling, the beauty of what they played. They played neither very accurately nor in good time, but they never went off the rails, and followed faithfully the marked changes of tone. They had that musical facility which is easily satisfied, that mediocre perfection which is so plentiful in the race which is said to be the most musical in the world. They had also that great appetite which does not stickle for the quality of its food, so only there be quantity—that healthy appetite to which all music is good, and the more substantial the better—it sees no difference between Brahms and Beethoven, or between the works of the same master, between an empty concerto and a moving sonata, because they are fashioned of the same stuff.

Christopher sat apart in a corner, which was his own, behind the piano. No one could disturb him there, for to reach it he had to go on all fours. It was half dark there, and the boy had just room to lie on the floor if he huddled up. The smoke of the tobacco filled his eyes and throat : dust, too ; there were large flakes of it like sheepskin, but he did not mind that, and listened gravely, squatting there Turkish fashion, and widening the holes in the cloth of the piano with his dirty little fingers. He did not like everything that they played ; but nothing that they played bored him,

and he never tried to formulate his opinions, for he thought himself too small to know anything. Only some music sent him to sleep, some woke him up ; it was never disagreeable to him. Without his knowing it, it was nearly always good music that excited him. Sure of not being seen, he made faces, he wrinkled his nose, ground his teeth, or held his tongue ; he flashed anger with his eyes, or made them languid ; he moved his arms and legs with a defiant and valiant air ; he wanted to march, to lunge out, to pulverize the world. He fidgeted so much that in the end a head would peer over the piano, and say : "Hullo, boy, are you mad ? Leave the piano. . . . Take your hand away, or I'll pull your ears !" And that made him crestfallen and angry. Why did they want to spoil his pleasure ? He was not doing any harm. Must he always be tormented ! His father chimed in. They chid him for making a noise, and said that he did not like music. And in the end he believed it. These honest citizens grinding out concertos would have been astonished if they had been told that the only person in the company who really felt the music was the little boy.

If they wanted him to keep quiet, why did they play airs which make you march ? In those pages were rearing horses, swords, war-cries, the pride of triumph ; and they wanted him, like them, to do no more than wag his head and beat time with his feet ! They had only to play placid dreams or some of those chattering pages which talk so much and say nothing. There are plenty of them, for example, like that piece of Goldmark's, of which the old watchmaker had just said with a delighted smile : "It is pretty. There is

no harshness in it. All the corners are rounded off. . . .” The boy was very quiet then. He became drowsy. He did not know what they were playing, and even came to not hearing it; but he was happy; his limbs were numbed, and he was dreaming.

His dreams were not a consecutive story; they had neither head nor tail. It was rarely that he saw a definite picture: his mother making a cake, and with a knife removing the paste that clung to her fingers; a water-rat that he had seen the night before swimming in the river; a whip that he wanted to make with a willow wand. . . . Heaven knows why these things should have cropped up in his memory at such a time! But most often he saw nothing at all, and yet he felt things innumerable and infinite. It was as though there were a number of very important things not to be spoken of, or not worth speaking of, because they were so well known, and because they had always been so. Some of them were sad, terribly sad; but there was nothing painful in them, as there is in the things that belong to real life; they were not ugly and debasing, like the blows that Christopher had from his father, or like the things that were in his head when, sick at heart with shame, he thought of some humiliation; they filled the mind with a melancholy calm. And some were bright and shining, shedding torrents of joy. And Christopher thought: “Yes, it is *thus*—thus that I will do by-and-by.” He did not know exactly what *thus* was, nor why he said it, but he felt that he had to say it, and that it was clear as day. He heard the sound of a sea, and he was quite near to it, kept from it only by a wall of dunes. Christopher had no idea what sea it was, or what it wanted with him, but

he was conscious that it would rise above the barrier of dunes. And then ! . . . Then all would be well, and he would be quite happy. Nothing to do but to hear it, then, quite near, to sink to sleep to the sound of its great voice, soothing away all his little griefs and humiliations. They were sad still, but no longer shameful nor injurious ; everything seemed natural and almost sweet.

Very often it was mediocre music that produced this intoxication in him. The writers of it were poor devils, with no thought in their heads but the gaining of money, or the hiding away of the emptiness of their lives by tagging notes together according to accepted formulæ—or to be original, in defiance of formulæ. But in the notes of music, even when handled by an idiot, there is such a power of life that they can let loose storms in a simple soul. Perhaps even the dreams suggested by the idiots are more mysterious and more free than those breathed by an imperious thought which drags you along by force, for aimless movement and empty chatter do not disturb the mind in its own pondering. . . .

So, forgotten and forgetting, the child stayed in his corner behind the piano, until suddenly he felt ants climbing up his legs. And he remembered then that he was a little boy with dirty nails, and that he was rubbing his nose against a whitewashed wall, and holding his feet in his hands.

On the day when Melchior, stealing on tiptoe, had surprised the boy at the keyboard that was too high for him, he had stayed to watch him for a moment, and suddenly there had flashed upon him : “ A little

prodigy ! . . . Why had he not thought of it ? . . . What luck for the family ! . . .” No doubt he had thought that the boy would be a little peasant like his mother. “It would cost nothing to try. What a great thing it would be ! He would take him all over Germany, perhaps abroad. It would be a jolly life, and noble to boot.” Melchior never failed to look for the nobility hidden in all he did, for it was not often that he failed to find it, after some reflection.

Strong in this assurance, immediately after supper, as soon as he had taken his last mouthful, he dumped the child once more in front of the piano, and made him go through the day’s lesson until his eyes closed in weariness. Then three times the next day. Then the day after that. Then every day. Christopher soon tired of it ; then he was sick to death of it ; finally he could stand it no more, and tried to revolt against it. There was no point in what he was made to do : nothing but learning to run as fast as possible over the keys, by loosening the thumb, or exercising the fourth finger, which would cling awkwardly to the two next to it. It got on his nerves ; there was nothing beautiful in it. There was an end of the magic sounds, and fascinating monsters, and the universe of dreams felt in one moment. . . . Nothing but scales and exercises—dry, monotonous, dull—duller than the conversation at meal-time, which was always the same—always about the dishes, and always the same dishes. At first the child listened absently to what his father said. When he was severely reprimanded he went on with a bad grace. He paid no attention to abuse ; he met it with bad temper. The last straw was when one evening he

heard Melchior unfold his plans in the next room. So it was in order to put him on show like a trick animal that he was so badgered, and forced every day to move bits of ivory ! He was not even given time to go and see his beloved river. What was it made them o set against him ? He was angry, hurt in his pride, robbed of his liberty. He decided that he would play no more, or as badly as possible, and would discourage his father. It would be hard, but at all costs he must keep his independence.

The very next lesson he began to put his plan into execution. He set himself conscientiously to hit the notes awry, or to bungle every touch. Melchior cried out, then roared, and blows began to rain. He had a heavy ruler. At every false note he struck the boy's fingers, and at the same time shouted in his ears, so that he was like to deafen him. Christopher's face twitched under the pain of it ; he bit his lips to stop himself crying, and stoically went on hitting the notes all wrong, bobbing his head down whenever he felt a blow coming. But his system was not good, and it was not long before he began to see that it was so. Melchior was as obstinate as his son, and he swore that even if they were to stay there two days and two nights he would not let him off a single note until it had been properly played. Then Christopher tried too deliberately to play wrongly, and Melchior began to suspect the trick, as he saw that the boy's hand fell heavily to one side at every note with obvious intent. The blows became more frequent ; Christopher was no longer conscious of his fingers. He wept pitifully and silently, sniffing, and swallowing down his sobs and tears. He understood that he had nothing to gain by

going on like that, and that he would have to resort to desperate measures. He stopped, and, trembling at the thought of the storm which was about to let loose, he said valiantly :

“ Papa, I won’t play any more.”

Melchior choked.

“ What ! What ! . . . ” he cried.

He took and almost broke the boy’s arm with shaking it. Christopher, trembling more and more, and raising his elbow to ward off the blows, said again :

“ I won’t play any more. First, because I don’t like being beaten. And then . . . ”

He could not finish. A terrific blow knocked the wind out of him, and Melchior roared :

“ Ah ! you don’t like being beaten ? You don’t like it ? . . . ”

Blows rained. Christopher bawled through his sobs :

“ And then . . . I don’t like music ! . . . I don’t like music ! . . . ”

He slipped down from his chair. Melchior roughly put him back, and knocked his knuckles against the keyboard. He cried :

“ You shall play ! ”

And Christopher shouted :

“ No ! No ! I won’t play ! ”

Melchior had to surrender. He thrashed the boy, thrust him from the room, and said that he should have nothing to eat all day, or the whole month, until he had played all his exercises without a mistake. He kicked him out and slammed the door after him.

Christopher found himself on the stairs, the dark and

dirty stairs, wormeaten. A draught came through a broken pane in the skylight, and the walls were dripping. Christopher sat on one of the greasy steps ; his heart was beating wildly with anger and emotion. In a low voice he cursed his father :

“Beast ! That’s what you are ! A beast . . . a gross creature . . . a brute ! Yes, a brute ! . . . and I hate you, I hate you ! . . . Oh, I wish you were dead ! I wish you were dead !”

His bosom swelled. He looked desperately at the sticky staircase, and the spider’s web swinging in the wind above the broken pane. He felt alone, lost in his misery. He looked at the gap in the banisters. . . . What if he were to throw himself down ? . . . or out of the window ? . . . Yes, what if he were to kill himself to punish them ? How remorseful they would be ! He heard the noise of his fall from the stairs. The door upstairs opened suddenly. Agonized voices cried : “He has fallen !—He has fallen !” Footsteps clattered downstairs. His father and mother threw themselves weeping upon his body. His mother sobbed : “It is your fault ! You have killed him !” His father waved his arms, threw himself on his knees, beat his head against the banisters, and cried : “What a wretch am I ! What a wretch am I !” The sight of all this softened his misery. He was on the point of taking pity on their grief ; but then he thought that it was well for them, and he enjoyed his revenge. . . .

When his story was ended, he found himself once more at the top of the stairs in the dark ; he looked down once more, and his desire to throw himself down was gone. He even shuddered a little, and moved

away from the edge, thinking that he might fall. Then he felt that he was a prisoner, like a poor bird in a cage—a prisoner for ever, with nothing to do but to break his head and hurt himself. He wept, wept, and he rubbed his eyes with his dirty little hands, so that in a moment he was filthy. As he wept he never left off looking at the things about him, and he found some distraction in that. He stopped moaning for a moment to look at the spider which had just begun to move. Then he began with less conviction. He listened to the sound of his own weeping, and went on mechanically with his sobbing without much knowing why he did so. Soon he got up; he was attracted by the window. He sat on the window-sill, retiring into the background, and watched the spider furtively. It interested while it revolted him.

Below the Rhine flowed, washing the walls of the house. In the staircase window it was like being suspended over the river in a moving sky. Christopher never limped down the stairs without taking a long look at it, but he had never yet seen it as it was to-day. Grief sharpens the senses; it is as though everything were more sharply graven on the vision after tears have washed away the dim traces of memory. The river was like a living thing to the child—a creature inexplicable, but how much more powerful than all the creatures that he knew! Christopher leaned forward to see it better; he pressed his mouth and flattened his nose against the pane. Where was *it* going? What did *it* want? *It* looked free, and sure of its road. . . . Nothing could stop *it*. At all hours of the day or night, rain or sun, whether there were joy or sorrow in the house, *it* went on going by, and it was as

though nothing mattered to *it*, as though *it* never knew sorrow, and rejoiced in *its* strength. What joy to be like *it*, to run through the fields, and by willow-branches, and over little shining pebbles and crisping sand, and to care for nothing, to be cramped by nothing, to be free ! . . .

The boy looked and listened greedily ; it was as though he were borne along by the river, moving by with it. . . . When he closed his eyes he saw colour—blue, green, yellow, red, and great chasing shadows and sunbeams. . . . What he sees takes shape. Now it is a large plain, reeds, corn waving under a breeze scented with new grass and mint. Flowers on every side—cornflowers, poppies, violets. How lovely it is ! How sweet the air ! How good it is to lie down in the thick, soft grass ! . . . Christopher feels glad and a little bewildered, as he does when on feast-days his father pours into his glass a little Rhine wine. . . . The river goes by. . . . The country is changed. . . . Now there are trees leaning over the water ; their delicate leaves, like little hands, dip, move, and turn about in the water. A village among the trees is mirrored in the river. There are cypress-trees, and the crosses of the cemetery showing above the white wall washed by the stream. Then there are rocks, a mountain gorge, vines on the slopes, a little pine-wood, and ruined castles. . . . And once more the plain, corn, birds, and the sun. . . .

The great green mass of the river goes by smoothly, like a single thought ; there are no waves, almost no ripples—smooth, oily patches. Christopher does not see it ; he has closed his eyes to hear it better. The ceaseless roaring fills him, makes him giddy ; he is

exalted by this eternal, masterful dream which goes no man knows whither. Over the turmoil of its depths rush waters, in swift rhythm, eagerly, ardently. And from the rhythm ascends music, like a vine climbing a trellis—arpeggios from silver keys, sorrowful violins, velvety and smooth-sounding flutes. . . . The country has disappeared. The river has disappeared. There floats by only a strange, soft, and twilight atmosphere. Christopher's heart flutters with emotion. What does he see now? Oh! Charming faces! . . . A little girl with brown tresses calls to him, slowly, softly, and mockingly. . . . A pale boy's face looks at him with melancholy blue eyes. . . . Others smile; other eyes look at him—curious and provoking eyes, and their glances make him blush—eyes affectionate and mournful, like the eyes of a dog—eyes imperious, eyes suffering. . . . And the pale face of a woman, with black hair, and lips close pressed, and eyes so large that they obscure her other features, and they gaze upon Christopher with an ardour that hurts him. . . . And, dearest of all, that face which smiles upon him with clear grey eyes and lips a little open, showing gleaming white teeth. . . . Ah! how kind and tender is that smile! All his heart is tenderness from it! How good it is to love! Again! Smile upon me again! Do not go! . . . Alas! it is gone! . . . But it leaves in his heart sweetness ineffable. Evil, sorrow, are no more; nothing is left. . . . Nothing, only an airy dream, like serene music, floating down a sunbeam, like the gossamers on fine summer days. . . . What has happened? What are these visions that fill the child with sadness and sweet sorrow? Never had he seen them before,

and yet he knew them and recognized them. Whence come they ? From what obscure abyss of creation ? Are they what has been . . . or *what will be* ? . . .

Now all is done, every haunting form is gone. Once more through a misty veil, as though he were soaring high above it, the river in flood appears, covering the fields, and rolling by, majestic, slow, almost still. And far, far away, like a steely light upon the horizon, a watery plain, a line of trembling waves—the sea. The river runs down to it. The sea seems to run up to the river. She fires him. He desires her. He must lose himself in her. . . . The music hovers ; lovely dance rhythms swing out madly ; all the world is rocked in their triumphant whirligig. . . . The soul, set free, cleaves space, like swallow's flight, like swallows drunk with the air, skimming across the sky with shrill cries. . . . Joy ! Joy ! There is nothing, nothing ! . . . Oh, infinite happiness ! . . .

Hours passed ; it was evening ; the staircase was in darkness. Drops of rain made rings upon the river's gown, and the current bore them dancing away. Sometimes the branch of a tree or pieces of black bark passed noiselessly and disappeared. The murderous spider had withdrawn to her darkest corner. And little Christopher was still leaning forward on the window-sill. His face was pale and dirty ; happiness shone in him. He was asleep.

III

E la faccia del sol nascere ombrata.

Purgatorio, xxx.

HE had to surrender. In spite of an obstinate and heroic resistance, blows triumphed over his ill-will. Every morning for three hours, and for three hours every evening, Christopher was set before the instrument of torture. All on edge with attention and weariness, with large tears rolling down his cheeks and nose, he moved his little red hands over the black and white keys—his hands were often stiff with cold—under the threatening ruler, which descended at every false note, and the harangues of his master, which were more odious to him than the blows. He thought that he hated music. And yet he applied himself to it with a zest which fear of Melchior did not altogether explain. Certain words of his grandfather had made an impression on him. The old man, seeing his grandson weeping, had told him, with that gravity which he always maintained for the boy, that it was worth while suffering a little for the most beautiful and noble art given to men for their consolation and glory. And Christopher, who was grateful to his grandfather for talking to him like a man, had been secretly touched by these simple words, which sorted well with his childish stoicism and growing pride. But, more than

by argument, he was bound and enslaved by the memory of certain musical emotions, bound and enslaved to the detested art, against which he tried in vain to rebel.

There was in the town, as usual in Germany, a theatre, where opera, opéra-comique, operetta, drama, comedy, and vaudeville are presented—every sort of play of every style and fashion. There were performances three times a week from six to nine in the evening. Old Jean Michel never missed one, and was equally interested in everything. Once he took his grandson with him. Several days beforehand he told him at length what the piece was about. Christopher did not understand it, but he did gather that there would be terrible things in it, and while he was consumed with the desire to see them he was much afraid, though he dared not confess it. He knew that there was to be a storm, and he was fearful of being struck by lightning. He knew that there was to be a battle, and he was not at all sure that he would not be killed. On the night before, in bed, he went through real agony, and on the day of the performance he almost wished that his grandfather might be prevented from coming for him. But when the hour was near, and his grandfather did not come, he began to worry, and every other minute looked out of the window. At last the old man appeared, and they set out together. His heart leaped in his bosom; his tongue was dry, and he could not speak.

They arrived at the mysterious building which was so often talked about at home. At the door Jean Michel met some acquaintances, and the boy, who was holding

his hand tight because he was afraid of being lost, could not understand how they could talk and laugh quietly at such a moment.

Jean Michel took his usual place in the first row behind the orchestra. He leaned on the balustrade, and began a long conversation with the contra-bass. He was at home there ; there he was listened to because of his authority as a musician, and he made the most of it ; it might almost be said that he abused it. Christopher could hear nothing. He was overwhelmed by his expectation of the play, by the appearance of the theatre, which seemed magnificent to him, by the opulence of the audience, who frightened him terribly. He dared not turn his head, for he thought that all eyes were fixed on him. He hugged his little cap between his knees, and he stared at the magic curtain with round eyes.

At last three blows were struck. His grandfather blew his nose, and drew the *libretto* from his pocket. He always followed it scrupulously, so much so that sometimes he neglected what was happening on the stage. The orchestra began to play. With the opening chords Christopher felt more at ease. He was at home in this world of sound, and from that moment, however extravagant the play might be, it seemed natural to him.

The curtain was raised, to reveal pasteboard trees and creatures who were not much more real. The boy looked at it all, gaping with admiration, but he was not surprised. The piece was set in a fantastic East, of which he could have had no idea. The poem was a web of ineptitudes, in which no human quality was perceptible. Christopher hardly grasped it at

all ; he made extraordinary mistakes, took one character for another, and pulled at his grandfather's sleeve to ask him absurd questions, which showed that he had understood nothing. He was not bored : passionately interested, on the contrary. Round the idiotic *libretto* he built a romance of his own invention, which had no sort of relation to the one that was represented on the stage. Every moment some incident upset his romance, and he had to repair it, but that did not worry him. He had made his choice of the people who moved upon the stage, making all sorts of different sounds, and breathlessly he followed the fate of those upon whom he had fastened his sympathy. He was especially concerned with a fair lady, of uncertain age, who had long, brilliantly fair hair, eyes of an unnatural size, and bare feet. The monstrous improbabilities of the setting did not shock him. His keen, childish eyes did not perceive the grotesque ugliness of the actors, large and fleshy, and the difformed chorus of all sizes in two lines, nor the pointlessness of their gestures, nor their faces bloated by their shrieks, nor the full wigs, nor the high heels of the tenor, nor the make-up of his lady-love, whose face was streaked with variegated pencilling. He was in the condition of a lover, whose passion blinds him to the actual aspect of the beloved object. The marvellous power of illusion, natural to children, stopped all unpleasant sensations on the way, and transformed them.

The music especially worked wonders. It bathed the whole scene in a misty atmosphere, in which everything became beautiful, noble, and desirable. It bred in the soul a desperate need of love, and at the same time

showed phantoms of love on all sides, to fill the void that itself had created. Little Christopher was overwhelmed by his emotion. There were words, gestures, musical phrases which disturbed him ; he dared not then raise his eyes ; he knew not whether it were well or ill ; he blushed and grew pale by turns ; sometimes there came drops of sweat upon his brow, and he was fearful lest all the people there should see his distress. When the catastrophe came about which inevitably breaks upon lovers in the fourth act of an opera so as to provide the tenor and the *prima donna* with an opportunity for showing off their shrillest screams, the child thought he must choke ; his throat hurt him as though he had caught cold ; he clutched at his neck with his hands, and could not swallow his saliva ; tears welled up in him ; his hands and feet were frozen. Fortunately, his grandfather was not much less moved. He enjoyed the theatre with a childish simplicity. During the dramatic passages he coughed carelessly to hide his distress, but Christopher saw it, and it delighted him. It was horribly hot ; Christopher was dropping with sleep, and he was very uncomfortable. But he thought only : “ Is there much longer ? It cannot be finished ! ” Then suddenly it was finished, without his knowing why. The curtain fell ; the audience rose ; the enchantment was broken.

They went home through the night, the two children—the old man and the little boy. What a fine night ! What a serene moonlight ! They said nothing ; they were turning over their memories. At last the old man said :

“ Did you like it, boy ? ”

Christopher could not reply ; he was still fearful

from emotion, and he would not speak, so as not to break the spell ; he had to make an effort to whisper, with a sigh :

“ Oh yes.”

The old man smiled. After a time he went on :

“ It’s a fine thing—a musician’s trade ! To create things like that, such marvellous spectacles—is there anything more glorious ? It is to be God on earth !”

The boy’s mind leaped to that. What ! a man had made all that ! That had not occurred to him. It had seemed that it must have made itself, must be the work of Nature. A man, a musician, such as he would be some day ! Oh, to be that for one day, only one day ! And then afterwards . . . afterwards, whatever you like ! Die, if necessary ! He asked :

“ What man made that, grandfather ?”

The old man told him of François Marie Hassler, a young German artist who lived at Berlin. He had known him once. Christopher listened, all ears. Suddenly he said :

“ And you, grandfather ?”

The old man trembled.

“ What ?” he asked.

“ Did you do things like that—you too ?”

“ Certainly,” said the old man a little crossly.

He was silent, and after they had walked a little he sighed heavily. It was one of the sorrows of his life. He had always longed to write for the theatre, and inspiration had always betrayed him. He had in his desk one or two acts written, but he had so little illusion as to their worth that he had never dared to submit them to an outside judgment.

They said no more until they reached home. Neither slept. The old man was troubled. He took his Bible for consolation. In bed Christopher turned over and over the events of the evening ; he recollected the smallest details, and the girl with the bare feet reappeared before him. As he dozed off a musical phrase rang in his ears as distinctly as if the orchestra were there. All his body leaped ; he sat up on his pillow, his head buzzing with music, and he thought : "Some day I also shall write. Oh, can I ever do it ?"

From that moment he had only one desire, to go to the theatre again, and he set himself to work more keenly, because they made a visit to the theatre his reward. He thought of nothing but that ; half the week he thought of the last performance, and the other half he thought of the next. He was fearful of being ill on a theatre day, and this fear made him often find in himself the symptoms of three or four illnesses. When the day came he did not eat ; he fidgeted like a soul in agony ; he looked at the clock fifty times, and thought that the evening would never come ; finally, unable to contain himself, he would go out an hour before the office opened, for fear of not being able to procure a seat, and, as he was the first in the empty theatre, he used to grow uneasy. His grandfather had told him that once or twice the audience had not been large enough, and so the players had preferred not to perform, and to give back the money. He watched the arrivals, and counted them, thinking : "Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five. . . . Oh, it is not enough . . . there will never be enough !" And when he saw some important person

enter the circle or the stalls, his heart was lighter, and he said to himself : " They will never dare to send him away. Surely they will play for him." But he was not convinced ; he would not be reassured until the musicians took their places. And even then he would be afraid that the curtain would rise, and they would announce, as they had done one evening, a change of programme. With lynx eyes he watched the stand of the contrabass to see if the title written on his music was that of the piece announced. And when he had seen it there, two minutes later he would look again to make quite sure that he had not been wrong. The conductor was not there. He must be ill. There was a stirring behind the curtain, and a sound of voices and hurried footsteps. Was there an accident, some untoward misfortune ? Silence again. The conductor was at his post. Everything seemed ready at last. . . . They did not begin ! What was happening ? He boiled over with impatience. Then the bell rang. His heart thumped away. The orchestra began the overture, and for a few hours Christopher would swim in happiness, troubled only by the idea that it must soon come to an end.

Some time after that a musical event brought even more excitement into Christopher's thoughts. François Marie Hassler, the author of the first opera which had so bowled him over, was to visit the town. He was to conduct a concert consisting of his compositions. The town was excited. The young musician was the subject of violent discussion in Germany, and for a fortnight he was the only topic of conversation. It was a different matter when he arrived. The friends

of Melchior and old Jean Michel continually came for news, and they went away with the most extravagant notions of the musician's habits and eccentricities. The child followed these narratives with eager attention. The idea that the great man was there in the town, breathing the same air as himself, treading the same stones, threw him into a state of dumb exaltation. He lived only in the hope of seeing him.

Hassler was staying at the Palace as the guest of the Grand Duke. He hardly went out, except to the theatre for rehearsals, to which Christopher was not admitted, and as he was very lazy he went to and fro in the Prince's carriage. Christopher did not have many opportunities of seeing him therefore, and he only succeeded once in catching sight of him as he drove in the carriage. He saw his fur coat, and wasted hours in waiting in the street, thrusting and jostling his way to right and left, and before and behind, to win and keep his place in front of the loungers. He consoled himself with spending half his days watching the windows of the Palace which had been pointed out as those of the master. Most often he only saw the shutters, for Hassler got up late, and the windows were closed almost all morning. This habit had made well-informed persons say that Hassler could not bear the light of day, and lived in eternal night.

At length Christopher was able to approach his hero. It was the day of the concert. All the town was there. The Grand Duke and his Court occupied the great royal box, surmounted with a crown, supported by two chubby cherubims. The theatre was in gala array. The stage was decorated with branches of oak and flowering laurel. All the musicians of any account

made it a point of honour to take their places in the orchestra. Melchior was at his post, and Jean Michel was conducting the chorus.

When Hassler appeared there was loud applause from every part of the house, and the ladies rose to see him better. Christopher devoured him with his eyes. Hassler had a young, sensitive face, though it was already rather puffy and tired-looking; his temples were bald, and his hair was thin on the crown of his head; for the rest, fair, curly hair. His blue eyes looked vague. He had a little fair moustache and an expressive mouth, which was rarely still, but twitched with a thousand imperceptible movements. He was tall, and held himself badly—not from awkwardness, but from weariness or boredom. He conducted capriciously and lithely, with his whole awkward body swaying, like his music, with gestures, now caressing, now sharp and jerky. It was easy to see that he was very nervous, and his music was the exact reflection of himself. The quivering and jerky life of it broke through the usual apathy of the orchestra. Christopher breathed heavily; in spite of his fear of drawing attention to himself, he could not stand still in his place; he fidgeted, got up, and the music gave him such violent and unexpected shocks that he had to move his head, arms, and legs, to the great discomfort of his neighbours, who warded off his kicks as best they could. The whole audience was enthusiastic, fascinated by the success, rather than by the compositions. At the end there was a storm of applause and cries, in which the trumpets in the orchestra joined, German fashion, with their triumphant blare in salute of the conqueror. Christopher trembled with pride,

as though these honours were for himself. He enjoyed seeing Hassler's face light up with childish pleasure. The ladies threw flowers, the men waved their hats, and the audience rushed for the platform. Everyone wanted to shake the master's hand. Christopher saw one enthusiast raise the master's hand to his lips, another steal a handkerchief that Hassler had left on the corner of his desk. He wanted to reach the platform also, although he did not know why, for if at that moment he had found himself near Hassler, he would have fled at once in terror and emotion. But he butted with all his force, like a ram, among the skirts and legs that divided him from Hassler. He was too small ; he could not break through.

Fortunately, when the concert was over, his grandfather came and took him to join in a party to serenade Hassler. It was night, and torches were lighted. All the musicians of the orchestra were there. They talked only of the marvellous compositions they had heard. They arrived outside the Palace, and took up their places without a sound under the master's windows. They took on an air of secrecy, although everybody, including Hassler, knew what was to come. In the silence of the night they began to play certain famous fragments of Hassler's compositions. He appeared at the window with the Prince, and they roared in their honour. Both bowed. A servant came from the Prince to invite the musicians to enter the Palace. They passed through great rooms, with frescoes representing naked men with helmets ; they were of a reddish colour, and were making gestures of defiance. The sky was covered with great clouds like sponges. There were also men and women of marble

clad in drawers made of iron. They walked on carpets so thick that their tread was inaudible, and they came at length to a room which was as light as day, and there were tables laden with drinks and good things

The Grand Duke was there, but Christopher did not see him ; he had eyes only for Hassler. Hassler came towards them ; he thanked them. He picked his words carefully, stopped awkwardly in the middle of a sentence, and extricated himself with a quip which made everybody laugh. They began to eat. Hassler took four or five musicians aside. He singled out Christopher's grandfather, and addressed very flattering words to him : he recollected that Jean Michel had been one of the first to perform his works, and he said that he had often heard tell of his excellence from a friend of his who had been a pupil of the old man's. Christopher's grandfather expressed his gratitude profusely ; he replied with such extraordinary eulogy that, in spite of his adoration of Hassler, the boy was ashamed. But to Hassler they seemed to be pleasant and in the rational order. Finally the old man, who had lost himself in his rigmarole, took Christopher by the hand, and presented him to Hassler. Hassler smiled at Christopher, and carelessly patted his head, and when he learned that the boy liked his music, and had not slept for several nights in anticipation of seeing him, he took him in his arms and plied him with questions. Christopher, struck dumb and blushing with pleasure, dared not look at him. Hassler took him by the chin and lifted his face up. Christopher ventured to look. Hassler's eyes were kind and smiling ; he began to smile too. Then he felt so happy, so wonderfully

happy in the great man's arms, that he burst into tears. Hassler was touched by this simple affection, and was more kind than ever. He kissed the boy and talked to him tenderly. At the same time he said funny things and tickled him to make him laugh; and Christopher could not help laughing through his tears. Soon he became at ease, and answered Hassler readily, and of his own accord he began to whisper in his ear all his small ambitions, as though he and Hassler were old friends; he told him how he wanted to be a musician like Hassler, and, like Hassler, to make beautiful things, and to be a great man. He, who was always ashamed, talked confidently; he did not know what he was saying; he was in a sort of ecstasy. Hassler smiled at his prattling and said:

"When you are a man, and have become a good musician, you shall come and see me in Berlin. I shall make something of you."

Christopher was too delighted to reply.

Hassler teased him.

"You don't want to?"

Christopher nodded his head violently five or six times, meaning "Yes."

"It is a bargain, then?"

Christopher nodded again.

"Kiss me, then."

Christopher threw his arms round Hassler's neck and hugged him with all his strength.

"Oh, you are wetting me! Let go! Your nose wants wiping!"

Hassler laughed, and wiped the boy's nose himself a little self-consciously, though he was quite jolly. He put him down, then took him by the hand, and led him

to a table, when he filled his pockets with cake, and left him, saying :

“ Good-bye ! Remember your promise.”

Christopher swam in happiness. The rest of the world had ceased to exist for him. He could remember nothing of what had happened earlier in the evening ; he followed lovingly Hassler’s every expression and gesture. One thing that he said struck him. Hassler was holding a glass in his hand ; he was talking, and his face suddenly hardened, and he said :

“ The joy of such a day must not make us forget our enemies. We must never forget our enemies. It is not their fault that we are not crushed out of existence. It will not be our fault if that does not happen to them. That is why the toast I propose is that there are people whose health . . . we will not drink !”

Everybody applauded and laughed at this original toast, and Hassler had laughed with the others, and his good-humoured expression had returned. But Christopher was put out by it. Although he did not permit himself to criticize any action of his hero, it hurt him that he had thought ugly things, when on such a night there ought to be nothing but brilliant thoughts and fancies. But he did not examine what he felt, and the impression that it made was soon driven out by his great joy and the drop of champagne which he drank out of his grandfather’s glass.

On the way back the old man never stopped talking ; he was delighted with the praise that Hassler had given him ; he cried out that Hassler was a genius such as had not been known for a century. Christopher said nothing, locking up in his heart his intoxication of love.

He had kissed him. *He* had held him in his arms !
How good *he* was ! How great !

"Ah," he thought in bed, as he kissed his pillow passionately, "I would die for him—die for him !"

The brilliant meteor which had flashed across the sky of the little town that night had a decisive influence on Christopher's mind. All his childhood Hassler was the model on which his eyes were fixed, and to follow his example the little man of six decided that he also would write music. To tell the truth, he had been doing so for long enough without knowing it, and he had not waited to be conscious of composing before he composed.

Everything is music for the born musician. Everything that throbs, or moves, or stirs, or palpitates—sunlit summer days, nights when the wind howls, flickering light, the twinkling of the stars, storms, the song of birds, the buzzing of insects, the murmuring of trees, voices, loved or loathed, familiar fireside sounds, a creaking door, blood moving in the veins in the silence of the night—everything that is is music ; all that is needed is that it should be heard. All the music of creation found its echo in Christopher. Everything that he saw, everything that he felt, was translated into music without his being conscious of it. He was like a buzzing hive of bees. But no one noticed it, himself least of all.

Like all children, he hummed perpetually at every hour of the day. Whatever he was doing—whether he were walking in the street, hopping on one foot, or lying on the floor at his grandfather's, with his head in his hands, absorbed in the pictures of a book, or sitting in his little chair in the darkest corner of the kitchen,

dreaming aimlessly in the twilight—always the monotonous murmuring of his little trumpet was to be heard, played with lips closed and cheeks blown out. His mother never paid any heed to it, but suddenly she would protest against it.

When he was tired of this state of half-sleep he would have to move and make a noise. Then he made music, singing it at the top of his voice. He had made tunes for every occasion. He had a tune for splashing in his wash-basin in the morning, like a little duck. He had a tune for sitting on the piano-stool in front of the detested instrument, and another for getting off it, and it was a more brilliant affair than the other. He had one for his mother putting the soup on the table ; he used to go before her then blowing a blare of trumpets. He played triumphal marches by which to go solemnly from the dining-room to the bedroom. Sometimes he would organize little processions with his two small brothers ; all then would file out gravely, one after another, and each had a tune to march to. But, as was right and proper, Christopher kept the best for himself. Every one of his tunes was strictly appropriated to its special occasion, and Christopher never by any chance confused them. Anybody else would have made mistakes, but he knew the shades of difference between them exactly.

One day at his grandfather's house he was going round the room clicking his heels, head up and chest out ; he went round and round and round, so that it was a wonder he did not turn sick, and played one of his compositions. The old man, who was shaving, stopped in the middle of it, and, with his face covered with lather, came to look at him, and said :

"What are you singing, boy?"

Christopher said he did not know.

"Sing it again!" said Jean Michel.

Christopher tried; he could not remember the tune. Proud of having attracted his grandfather's attention, he tried to make him admire his voice, and sang after his own fashion an air from some opera, but that was not what the old man wanted. Jean Michel said nothing, and seemed not to notice him any more. But he left the door of his room ajar while the boy was playing alone in the next room.

A few days later Christopher, with the chairs arranged about him, was playing a comedy in music, which he had made up of scraps that he remembered from the theatre, and he was making steps and bows, as he had seen them done, to a minuet, and addressing himself to the portrait of Beethoven which hung above the table. As he turned with a pirouette he saw his grandfather watching him through the half-open door. He thought the old man was laughing at him; he was abashed, and stopped dead; he ran to the window, and pressed his face against the panes, pretending that he had been watching something of the greatest interest. But the old man said nothing; he came to him and kissed him, and Christopher saw that he was pleased. His vanity made the most of these signs; he was clever enough to see that he had been appreciated; but he did not know exactly which his grandfather had admired most—his talent as a dramatic author, or as a musician, or as a singer, or as a dancer. He inclined to the latter, for he prided himself on this.

A week later, when he had forgotten the whole

affair, his grandfather said mysteriously that he had something to show him. He opened his desk, took out a music-book, and put it on the rack of the piano, and told the boy to play. Christopher was very much interested, and deciphered it fairly well. The notes were written by hand in the old man's large handwriting, and he had taken especial pains with it. The headings were adorned with scrolls and flourishes. After some moments the old man, who was sitting beside Christopher turning the pages for him, asked him what the music was. Christopher had been too much absorbed in his playing to notice what he had played, and said that he did not know it.

"Listen ! . . . You don't know it ?"

Yes ; he thought he knew it, but he did not know where he had heard it. The old man laughed.

"Think."

Christopher shook his head.

"I don't know."

A light was fast dawning in his mind ; it seemed to him that the air . . . But ; no ! He dared not. . . . He would not recognize it.

"I don't know, grandfather."

He blushed.

"What, you little fool, don't you see that it is your own."

He was sure of it, but to hear it said made his heart thump.

"Oh ! grandfather ! . . ."

Beaming, the old man showed him the book.

"See : *Aria*. It is what you were singing on Tuesday when you were lying on the floor. *March*. That is what I asked you to sing again last week, and you could

not remember it. *Minuet*. That is what you were dancing by the arm-chair. Look !”

On the cover was written in wonderful Gothic letters :

“ *The Pleasures of Childhood : Aria, Minuetto, Valse, and Marcia, Op. 1, by John Christopher Kraftt.*”

Christopher was dazzled by it. To see his name, and that fine title, and that large book—his work ! . . . He went on murmuring :

“ Oh ! grandfather ! grandfather ! . . .”

The old man drew him to him. Christopher threw himself on his knees, and hid his head in Jean Michel’s bosom. He was covered with blushes from his happiness. The old man was even happier, and went on, in a voice which he tried to make indifferent, for he felt that he was on the point of breaking down :

“ Of course, I added the accompaniment and the harmony to fit the song. And then ”—he coughed—“ and then, I added a *trio* to the minuet, because . . . because it is usual . . . and then . . . I think it is not at all bad.”

He played it. Christopher was very proud of collaborating with his grandfather.

“ But, grandfather, you must put your name to it too.”

“ It is not worth while. It is not worth while others besides yourself knowing it. Only ”—here his voice trembled—“ only, later on, when I am no more, it will remind you of your old grandfather . . . eh ? You won’t forget him ?”

The poor old man did not say that he had been unable to resist the quite innocent pleasure of introducing one of his own unfortunate airs into his grandson’s work, which he felt was destined to survive him ;

but his desire to share in this imaginary glory was very humble and very touching, since it was enough for him anonymously to transmit to posterity a scrap of his own thought, so as not altogether to perish. Christopher was touched by it, and covered his face with kisses, and the old man, growing more and more tender, kissed his hair.

“ You will remember me ? Later on, when you are a good musician, a great artist, who will bring honour to his family, to his art, and to his country, when you are famous, you will remember that it was your old grandfather who first perceived it, and foretold what you would be ? ”

There were tears in his eyes as he listened to his own words. He was reluctant to let such signs of weakness be seen. He had an attack of coughing, became moody, and sent the boy away hugging the precious manuscript.

Christopher went home bewildered by his happiness. The stones danced about him. The reception he had from his family sobered him a little. When he blurted out the splendour of his musical exploit they cried out upon him. His mother laughed at him. Melchior declared that the old man was mad, and that he would do better to take care of himself than to set about turning the boy's head. As for Christopher, he would oblige by putting such follies from his mind, and sitting down *illico* at the piano, and playing exercises for four hours. He must first learn to play properly ; and as for composing, there was plenty of time for that later on when he had nothing better to do.

Melchior was not, as these words of wisdom might indicate, trying to keep the boy from the dangerous exaltation of a too early pride. On the contrary, he

proved immediately that this was not so. But never having himself had any idea to express in music, and never having had the least need to express an idea, he had come, as a *virtuoso*, to consider composing a secondary matter, which was only given value by the art of the executant. He was not insensible of the tremendous enthusiasm roused by great composers like Hassler. For such ovations he had the respect which he always paid to success—mingled, perhaps, with a little secret jealousy—for it seemed to him that such applause was stolen from him. But he knew by experience that the successes of the great *virtuosi* are no less remarkable, and are more personal in character, and therefore more fruitful of agreeable and flattering consequences. He affected to pay profound homage to the genius of the master musicians ; but he took a great delight in telling absurd anecdotes of them, presenting their intelligence and morals in a lamentable light. He placed the *virtuoso* at the top of the artistic ladder, for, he said, it is well known that the tongue is the noblest member of the body, and what would thought be without words ? What would music be without the executant ? But whatever may have been the reason for the scolding that he gave Christopher, it was not without its uses in restoring some common sense to the boy, who was almost beside himself with his grandfather's praises. It was not quite enough. Christopher, of course, decided that his grandfather was much cleverer than his father, and though he sat down at the piano without sulking, he did so not so much for the sake of obedience as to be able to dream in peace, as he always did while his fingers ran mechanically over the keyboard. While he played his intermin-

able exercises he heard a proud voice inside himself saying over and over again : "I am a composer—a great composer."

From that day on, since he was a composer, he set himself to composing. Before he had even learned to write, he continued to cipher crotchets and quavers on scraps of paper, which he tore from the household account-books. But in the effort to find out what he was thinking, and to set it down in black and white, he arrived at thinking nothing, except when he wanted to think something. But he did not for that give up making musical phrases, and as he was a born musician he made them somehow, even if they meant nothing at all. Then he would take them in triumph to his grandfather, who wept with joy over them—he wept easily now that he was growing old—and vowed that they were wonderful.

All this was like to spoil him altogether. Fortunately, his own good sense saved him, helped by the influence of a man who made no pretension of having any influence over anybody, and set nothing before the eyes of the world but a common-sense point of view. This man was Louisa's brother.

Like her, he was small, thin, puny, and rather round-shouldered. No one knew exactly how old he was ; he could not be more than forty, but he looked more than fifty. He had a little wrinkled face, with a pink complexion, kind pale blue eyes, like faded forget-me-nots. When he took off his cap, which he used fussily to wear everywhere from his fear of draughts, he exposed a little pink bald head, conical in shape, which was the great delight of Christopher and his brothers. They never left off teasing him about it, asking him what he

had done with his hair, and, encouraged by Melchior's pleasantries, threatening to smack it. He was the first to laugh at them, and put up with their treatment of him patiently. He was a pedlar ; he used to go from village to village with a pack on his back, containing everything—groceries, stationery, confectionery, handkerchiefs, scarves, shoes, pickles, almanacs, songs, and drugs. Several attempts had been made to make him settle down, and to buy him a little business—a store or a drapery shop. But he could not do it. One night he would get up, push the key under the door, and set off again with his pack. Weeks and months went by before he was seen again. Then he would reappear. One evening they would hear him fumbling at the door ; the door would half open, and the little bald head, politely uncovered, would appear with its kind eyes and timid smile. He would say, "Good-evening, everybody," carefully wipe his shoes before entering, salute everybody, beginning with the eldest, and go and sit in the most remote corner of the room. There he would light his pipe, and sit huddled up, waiting quietly until the usual storm of questions was over. The two Kraffts, Christopher's father and grandfather, had a jeering contempt for him. The little freak seemed ridiculous to them, and their pride was touched by the low degree of the pedlar. They made him feel it, but he seemed to take no notice of it, and showed them a profound respect which disarmed them, especially the old man, who was very sensitive to what people thought of him. They used to crush him with heavy pleasantries, which often brought the blush to Louisa's cheeks. Accustomed to bow without dispute to the intellectual superiority of the Kraffts, she had

no doubt that her husband and father-in-law were right ; but she loved her brother, and her brother had for her a dumb adoration. They were the only members of their family, and they were both humble, crushed, and thrust aside by life ; they were united in sadness and tenderness by a bond of mutual pity and common suffering, borne in secret. With the Kraffts—robust, noisy, brutal, solidly built for living, and living joyously—these two weak, kindly creatures, out of their setting, so to speak, outside life, understood and pitied each other without ever saying anything to each other.

Christopher, with the cruel carelessness of childhood, shared the contempt of his father and grandfather for the little pedlar. He made fun of him, and treated him as a comic figure ; he worried him with stupid teasing, which his uncle bore with his unshakable phlegm. But Christopher loved him, without quite knowing why. He loved him first of all as a plaything with which he did what he liked. He loved him also because he always gave him something nice—a dainty, a picture, an amusing toy. The little man's return was a joy for the children, for he always had some surprise for them. Poor as he was, he always contrived to bring them each a present, and he never forgot the birthday of any one of the family. He always turned up on these august days, and brought out of his pocket some jolly present, lovingly chosen. They were so used to it that they hardly thought of thanking him ; it seemed natural, and he appeared to be sufficiently repaid by the pleasure he had given. But Christopher, who did not sleep very well, and during the night used to turn over in his mind the events of the day, used sometimes

to think that his uncle was very kind, and he used to be filled with floods of gratitude to the poor man. He never showed it when the day came, because he thought that the others would laugh at him. Besides, he was too little to give to kindness all the rare value that it has. In the language of children kind and stupid are almost synonymous, and Uncle Gottfried seemed to be the living proof of it.

One evening when Melchior was dining out, Gottfried was left alone in the living-room, while Louisa put the children to bed. He went out, and sat by the river a few yards away from the house. Christopher, having nothing better to do, followed him, and, as usual, tormented him with his puppy tricks until he was out of breath, and dropped down on the grass at his feet. Lying on his belly, he buried his nose in the turf. When he had recovered his breath, he cast about for some new crazy thing to say. When he found it he shouted it out, and rolled about with laughing, with his face still buried in the earth. He received no answer. Surprised by the silence, he raised his head, and began to repeat his joke. He saw Gottfried's face lit up by the last beams of the setting sun cast through golden mists. He swallowed down his words. Gottfried smiled with his eyes half closed and his mouth half open, and in his sorrowful face was an expression of sadness and unutterable melancholy. Christopher, with his face in his hands, watched him. The night came; little by little Gottfried's face disappeared. Silence reigned. Christopher in his turn was filled with the mysterious impressions which had been reflected on Gottfried's face. He fell into a vague stupor. The earth was in darkness, the sky was bright; the stars peeped out. The little

waves of the river chattered against the bank. The boy grew sleepy. Without seeing them, he bit off little blades of grass. A grasshopper chirped near him. It seemed to him that he was going to sleep.

Suddenly, in the dark, Gottfried began to sing. He sang in a weak, husky voice, as though to himself ; he could not have been heard twenty yards away. But there was sincerity and emotion in his voice ; it was as though he were thinking aloud, and that through the song, as through clear water, the very inmost heart of him was to be seen. Never had Christopher heard such singing, and never had he heard such a song. Slow, simple, childish, it moved gravely, sadly, a little monotonously, never hurrying—with long pauses—then setting out again on its way, careless where it arrived, and losing itself in the night. It seemed to come from far away, and it went no man knows whither. Its serenity was full of sorrow, and beneath its seeming peace there dwelt an agony of the ages. Christopher held his breath ; he dared not move ; he was cold with emotion. When it was done he crawled towards Gottfried, and in a choking voice said :

“ Uncle ! ”

Gottfried did not reply.

“ Uncle ! ” repeated the boy, placing his hands and chin on Gottfried’s knees.

Gottfried said kindly :

“ Well, boy. . . . ”

“ What is it, uncle ? Tell me ! What were you singing ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Tell me what it is ! ”

“ I don’t know. Just a song.”

"A song that you made."

"No, not I! What an idea! . . . It is an old song."

"Who made it?"

"No one knows. . . ."

"When?"

"No one knows. . . ."

"When you were little?"

"Before I was born, before my father was born, and before his father, and before his father's father. . . . It has always been."

"How strange! No one has ever told me about it." He thought for a moment.

"Uncle, do you know any other?"

"Yes."

"Sing another, please."

"Why should I sing another? One is enough. One sings when one wants to sing, when one has to sing. One must not sing for the fun of it."

"But what about when one makes music?"

"That is not music."

The boy was lost in thought. He did not quite understand. But he asked for no explanation. It was true, it was not music, not like all the rest. He went on:

"Uncle, have you ever made them?"

"Made what?"

"Songs!"

"Songs? Oh! How should I make them? They can't be made."

With his usual logic the boy insisted:

"But, uncle, it must have been made once. . . ."
Gottfried shook his head obstinately.

"It has always been."

The boy returned to the attack :

"But, uncle, isn't it possible to make other songs, new songs ?"

"Why make them ? There are enough for everything. There are songs for when you are sad, and for when you are gay ; for when you are weary, and for when you are thinking of home ; for when you despise yourself, because you have been a vile sinner, a worm upon the earth ; for when you want to weep, because people have not been kind to you ; and for when your heart is glad, because the world is beautiful, and you see God's heaven, which, like Him, is always kind, and seems to laugh at you. . . . There are songs for everything, everything. Why should I make them ?"

"To be a great man !" said the boy, full of his grandfather's teaching and his simple dreams.

Gottfried laughed softly. Christopher, a little hurt, asked him :

"Why are you laughing ?"

Gottfried said :

"Oh ! I ? . . . I am nobody."

He kissed the boy's head, and said :

"You want to be a great man ?"

"Yes," said Christopher proudly. He thought Gottfried would admire him. But Gottfried replied :

"What for ?"

Christopher was taken aback. He thought for a moment, and said :

"To make beautiful songs !"

Gottfried laughed again, and said :

"You want to make beautiful songs, so as to be a great man ; and you want to be a great man, so as to

make beautiful songs. You are like a dog chasing its own tail."

Christopher was dashed. At any other time he would not have borne his uncle laughing at him, he at whom he was used to laughing. And, at the same time, he would never have thought Gottfried clever enough to stump him with an argument. He cast about for some answer or some impertinence to throw at him, but could find none. Gottfried went on :

"When you are as great as from here to Coblenz, you will never make a single song."

Christopher revolted on that.

"And if I will ! . . ."

"The more you want to, the less you can. To make songs, you have to be like those creatures. Listen. . . ."

The moon had risen, round and gleaming, behind the fields. A silvery mist hovered above the ground and the shimmering waters. The frogs croaked, and in the meadows the melodious fluting of the toads arose. The shrill tremolo of the grasshoppers seemed to answer the twinkling of the stars. The wind rustled softly in the branches of the alders. From the hills above the river there came down the sweet light song of a nightingale.

"What need is there to sing?" sighed Gottfried, after a long silence. (It was not clear whether he were talking to himself or to Christopher.) "Don't they sing sweeter than anything that you could make?"

Christopher had often heard these sounds of the night, and he loved them. But never had he heard them as he heard them now. It was true : what need was there to sing ? . . . His heart was full of tenderness and sorrow. He was fain to embrace the meadows,

the river, the sky, the clear stars. He was filled with love for his uncle Gottfried, who seemed to him now the best, the cleverest, the most beautiful of men. He thought how he had misjudged him, and he thought that his uncle was sad because he, Christopher, had misjudged him. He was remorseful. He wanted to cry out : " Uncle, do not be sad ! I will not be naughty again. Forgive me, I love you !" But he dared not. And suddenly he threw himself into Gottfried's arms, but the words would not come, only he repeated, " I love you !" and kissed him passionately. Gottfried was surprised and touched, and went on saying, " What ? What ?" and kissed him. Then he got up, took him by the hand, and said : " We must go in." Christopher was sad because his uncle had not understood him. But as they came to the house, Gottfried said : " If you like we'll go again to hear God's music, and I will sing you some more songs." And when Christopher kissed him gratefully as they said good-night, he saw that his uncle had understood.

Thereafter they often went for walks together in the evening, and they walked without a word along by the river, or through the fields. Gottfried slowly smoked his pipe, and Christopher, a little frightened by the darkness, would give him his hand. They would sit down on the grass, and after a few moments of silence Gottfried would talk to him about the stars and the clouds ; he taught him to distinguish the breathing of the earth, air, and water, the songs, cries, and sounds of the little worlds of flying, creeping, hopping, and swimming things swarming in the darkness, and the signs of rain and fine weather, and the countless instruments of the symphony of the night.

Sometimes Gottfried would sing tunes, sad or gay, but always of the same kind, and always in the end Christopher would be brought to the same sorrow. But he would never sing more than one song in an evening, and Christopher noticed that he did not sing gladly when he was asked to do so ; it had to come of itself, just when he wanted to. Sometimes they had to wait for a long time without speaking, and just when Christopher was beginning to think, "He is not going to sing this evening," Gottfried would make up his mind.

One evening, when nothing would induce Gottfried to sing, Christopher thought of submitting to him one of his own small compositions, in the making of which he found so much trouble and pride. He wanted to show what an artist he was. Gottfried listened very quietly, and then said :

"That is very ugly, my poor dear Christopher !"

Christopher was so hurt that he could find nothing to say. Gottfried went on pityingly :

"Why did you do it ? It is so ugly ! No one forced you to do it."

Hot with anger, Christopher protested :

"My grandfather thinks my music fine."

"Ah !" said Gottfried, not turning a hair. "No doubt he is right. He is a learned man. He knows all about music. I know nothing about it. . . ."

And after a moment :

"But I think that is very ugly."

He looked quietly at Christopher, and saw his angry face, and smiled, and said :

"Have you composed any others ? Perhaps I shall like the others better than that."

Christopher thought that his other compositions might wipe out the impression of the first, and he sang them all. Gottfried said nothing ; he waited until they were finished. Then he shook his head, and with profound conviction said :

“ They are even more ugly.”

Christopher shut his lips, and his chin trembled ; he wanted to cry. Gottfried went on as though he himself were upset.

“ How ugly they are !”

Christopher, with tears in his voice, cried out :

“ But why do you say they are ugly ?”

Gottfried looked at him with his frank eyes.

“ Why ? . . . I don’t know. . . . Wait. . . . They are ugly . . . first, because they are stupid. . . . Yes, that’s it. . . . They are stupid, they don’t mean anything. . . . You see ? When you wrote, you had nothing to say. Why did you write them ?”

“ I don’t know,” said Christopher, in a piteous voice.

“ I wanted to write something pretty.”

“ There you are ! You wrote for the sake of writing. You wrote because you wanted to be a great musician, and to be admired. You have been proud ; you have been a liar ; you have been punished. . . . You see ! A man is always punished when he is proud and a liar in music. Music must be modest and sincere—or else, what is it ? Impious, a blasphemy of the Lord, who has given us song to tell the honest truth.”

He saw the boy’s distress, and tried to kiss him. But Christopher turned angrily away, and for several days he sulked. He hated Gottfried. But it was in vain that he said over and over to himself : “ He is an

ass ! He knows nothing—nothing ! My grandfather, who is much cleverer, likes my music.” In his heart he knew that his uncle was right, and Gottfried’s words were graven on his inmost soul ; he was ashamed to have been a liar.

And, in spite of his resentment, he always thought of it when he was writing music, and often he tore up what he had written, being ashamed already of what Gottfried would have thought of it. When he got over it, and wrote a melody which he knew to be not quite sincere, he hid it carefully from his uncle ; he was fearful of his judgment, and was quite happy when Gottfried just said of one of his pieces : “ That is not so very ugly. . . . I like it. . . . ”

Sometimes, by way of revenge, he used to trick him by giving him as his own melodies from the great musicians, and he was delighted when it happened that Gottfried disliked them heartily. But that did not trouble Gottfried. He would laugh loudly when he saw Christopher clap his hands, and dance about him delightedly, and he always returned to his usual argument : “ It is well enough written, but it says nothing.” He always refused to be present at one of the little concerts given in Melchior’s house. However beautiful the music might be, he would begin to yawn and look sleepy with boredom. Very soon he would be unable to bear it any longer, and would steal away quietly. He used to say :

“ You see, my boy, everything that you write in the house is not music. Music in a house is like sunshine in a room. Music is to be found outside where you breathe God’s dear fresh air.”

He was always talking of God, for he was very

pious, unlike the two Kraffts, father and son, who were free-thinkers, and took care to eat meat on Fridays.

Suddenly, for no apparent reason, Melchior changed his opinion. Not only did he approve of his father having put together Christopher's inspirations, but, to the boy's great surprise, he spent several evenings in making two or three copies of his manuscript. To every question put to him on the subject, he replied impressively, "We shall see ; . . ." or he would rub his hands and laugh, smack the boy's head by way of a joke, or turn him up and blithely spank him. Christopher loathed these familiarities, but he saw that his father was pleased, and did not know why.

Then there were mysterious confabulations between Melchior and his father. And one evening Christopher, to his astonishment, learned that he, Christopher, had dedicated to H.S.H. the Grand Duke Leopold the *Pleasures of Childhood*. Melchior had sounded the disposition of the Prince, who had shown himself graciously inclined to accept the homage. Thereupon Melchior declared that without losing a moment they must, *primo*, draw up the official request to the Prince ; *secondo*, publish the work ; *tertio*, organize a concert to give it a hearing.

There were further long conferences between Melchior and Jean Michel. They argued heatedly for two or three evenings. It was forbidden to interrupt them. Melchior wrote, erased ; erased, wrote. The old man talked loudly, as though he were reciting verses. Sometimes they squabbled or thumped on the table because they could not find a word.

Then Christopher was called, made to sit at the table with a pen in his hand, his father on his right, his grandfather on his left, and the old man began to dictate words which he did not understand, because he found it difficult to write every word in his enormous letters, because Melchior was shouting in his ear, and because the old man declaimed with such emphasis that Christopher, put out by the sound of the words, could not bother to listen to their meaning. The old man was no less in a state of emotion. He could not sit still, and he walked up and down the room, involuntarily illustrating the text of what he read with gestures, but he came every minute to look over what the boy had written, and Christopher, frightened by the two large faces looking over his shoulder, put out his tongue, and held his pen clumsily. A mist floated before his eyes ; he made too many strokes, or smudged what he had written ; and Melchior roared, and Jean Michel stormed ; and he had to begin again, and then again, and when he thought that they had at last come to an end, a great blot fell on the immaculate page. Then they pulled his ears, and he burst into tears ; but they forbade him to weep, because he was spoiling the paper, and they began to dictate, beginning all over again, and he thought it would go on like that to the end of his life.

At last it was finished, and Jean Michel leaned against the mantelpiece, and read over their handiwork in a voice trembling with pleasure, while Melchior sat straddled across a chair, and looked at the ceiling and wagged his chair, and as a connoisseur rolled round his tongue the style of the following epistle :

*“ Most Noble and Sublime Highness ! Most
Gracious Lord !*

“ From my fourth year Music has been the first occupation of my childish days. So soon as I allied myself to the noble Muse, who roused my soul to pure harmony, I loved her, and, as it seemed to me, she returned my love. Now I am in my sixth year, and for some time my Muse in hours of inspiration has whispered in my ears : ‘ Be bold ! Be bold ! Write down the harmonies of thy soul ! ’ ‘ Six years old,’ thought I, ‘ and how should I be bold ? What would the learned in the art say of me ? ’ I hesitated. I trembled. But my Muse insisted. I obeyed. I wrote.

“ And now shall I,

O Most Sublime Highness !

—shall I have the temerity and audacity to place upon the steps of Thy Throne the first-fruits of my youthful labours ? . . . Shall I make so bold as to hope that Thou wilt let fall upon them the august approbation of Thy paternal regard ? . . .

“ Oh, yes ! For Science and the Arts have ever found in Thee their sage Mæcenas, their generous champion, and talent puts forth its flowers under the ægis of Thy holy protection.

“ In this profound and certain faith I dare, then, approach Thee with these youthful efforts. Receive them as a pure offering of my childish veneration, and of Thy goodness deign,

O Most Sublime Highness !

to glance at them, and at their young author, who bows at Thy feet deeply and in humility !

“ From the most submissive, faithful, and obedient servant of His Most Noble and Most Sublime Highness,

“ JOHN CHRISTOPHER KRAFFT.”

Christopher heard nothing. He was very happy to have finished, and, fearing that he would be made to begin again, he ran away to the fields. He had no idea of what he had written, and he cared not at all. But when the old man had finished his reading he began again to taste the full flavour of it, and when the second reading came to an end Melchior and he declared that it was a little masterpiece. That was also the opinion of the Grand Duke, to whom the letter was presented, with a copy of the musical work. He was kind enough to send word that he found both quite charming. He granted permission for the concert, and ordered that the hall of his Academy of Music should be put at Melchior's disposal, and deigned to promise that he would have the young artist presented to himself on the day of the performance.

Melchior set about organizing the concert as quickly as possible. He engaged the support of the *Hof Musik Verein*, and as the success of his first ventures had blown out his sense of proportion, he undertook at the same time to publish a magnificent edition of the *Pleasures of Childhood*. He wanted to have printed on the cover of it a portrait of Christopher at the piano, with himself, Melchior, standing by his side, violin in hand. He had to abandon that, not on account of the cost—Melchior did not stop at any

expense—but because there was not time enough. He fell back on an allegorical design representing a cradle, a trumpet, a drum, a wooden horse, grouped round a lyre which put forth rays like the sun. The title-page bore, together with a long dedication, in which the name of the Prince stood out in enormous letters, a notice to the effect that “Herr John Christopher Krafft was six years old.” He was, in fact, seven and a half. The printing of the design was very expensive. To meet the bill for it, Jean Michel had to sell an old eighteenth-century chest, carved with faces, which he had never consented to sell, in spite of the repeated offers of Wormser, the furniture-dealer. But Melchior had no doubt but the subscriptions would cover the cost, and beyond that the expenses of printing the composition.

One other question occupied his mind : how to dress Christopher on the day of the concert. There was a family council to decide the matter. Melchior would have liked the boy to appear in a short frock and bare legs, like a child of four. But Christopher was very large for his age, and everybody knew him. They could not hope to deceive anyone. Melchior had a great idea. He decided that the boy should wear a dress-coat and white tie. In vain did Louisa protest that they would make her poor boy ridiculous. Melchior anticipated exactly the success and merriment that would be produced by such an unexpected appearance. It was decided on; and the tailor came and measured Christopher for his little coat. He had also to have fine linen and patent-leather pumps, and all that swallowed up their last penny. Christopher was very uncomfortable in his new clothes. To make him

used to them they made him try on his various garments. For a whole month he hardly left the piano-stool. They taught him to bow. He had never a moment of liberty. He raged against it, but dared not rebel, for he thought that he was going to accomplish something startling. He was both proud and afraid of it. They pampered him ; they were afraid he would catch cold ; they swathed his neck in scarves ; they warmed his boots in case they were wet ; and at table he had the best of everything.

At last the great day arrived. The barber came to preside over his toilet and curl Christopher's rebellious hair. He did not leave it until he had made it look like a sheep-skin. All the family walked round Christopher and declared that he was superb. Melchior, after looking him up and down, and turning him about and about, was seized with an idea, and went off to fetch a large flower, which he put in his button-hole. But when Louisa saw him she raised her hands, and cried out distressfully that he looked like a monkey. That hurt him cruelly. He did not know whether to be ashamed or proud of his garb. Instinctively he felt humiliated, and he was more so at the concert. Humiliation was to be for him the outstanding emotion of that memorable day.

The concert was about to begin. The hall was half empty ; the Grand Duke had not arrived. One of those kindly and well-informed friends who always appear on these occasions came and told them that there was a Council being held at the Palace, and that the Grand Duke would not come. He had it on good authority. Melchior was in despair. He fidgeted,

paced up and down, and looked repeatedly out of the window. Old Jean Michel was also in torment, but he was concerned for his grandson. He bombarded him with instructions. Christopher was infected by the nervousness of his family. He was not in the least anxious about his compositions, but he was troubled by the thought of the bows that he had to make to the audience, and thinking of them brought him to agony.

However, he had to begin ; the audience was growing impatient. The orchestra of the *Hof Musik Verein* began the *Coriolan Overture*. The boy knew neither Coriolan nor Beethoven, for though he had often heard Beethoven's music, he had not known it. He never bothered about the names of the works he heard. He gave them names of his own invention, while he created little stories or pictures for them. He classified them usually in three categories : fire, water, and earth, with a thousand degrees between each. Mozart belonged almost always to water. He was a meadow by the side of a river, a transparent mist floating over the water, a spring shower, or a rainbow. Beethoven was fire—now a furnace with gigantic flames and vast columns of smoke ; now a burning forest, a heavy and terrible cloud, flashing lightning ; now a wide sky full of quivering stars, one of which breaks free, swoops, and dies on a fine September night setting the heart beating. Now the imperious ardour of that heroic soul burned him like fire. Everything else disappeared. What was it all to him ?—Melchior in despair, Jean Michel agitated, all the busy world, the audience, the Grand Duke, little Christopher. What had he to do with all these ? What lay between them and him ?

Was that he—he, himself ? . . . He was given up to the furious will that carried him headlong. He followed it breathlessly, with tears in his eyes, and his legs numb, thrilling from the palms of his hands to the soles of his feet. His blood drummed “Charge !” and he trembled in every limb. And as he listened so intensely, hiding behind a curtain, his heart suddenly leaped violently. The orchestra had stopped short in the middle of a bar, and after a moment’s silence it broke into a crashing of brass and cymbals with a military march, officially strident. The transition from one sort of music to another was so brutal, so unexpected, that Christopher ground his teeth and stamped his foot with rage, and shook his fist at the wall. But Melchior rejoiced. The Grand Duke had come in, and the orchestra was saluting him with the National Anthem. And in a trembling voice Jean Michel gave his last instructions to his grandson.

The overture began again, and this time was finished. It was now Christopher’s turn. Melchior had arranged the programme to show off at the same time the skill of both father and son. They were to play together a sonata for violin and piano of Mozart. For the sake of effect he had decided that Christopher should enter alone. He was led to the entrance of the stage, and showed the piano at the front, and for the last time it was explained what he had to do, and then he was pushed on from the wings.

He was not much afraid, for he was used to the theatre ; but when he found himself alone on the platform, with hundreds of eyes staring at him, he became suddenly so frightened that instinctively he moved backwards and turned towards the wings to go back

again. He saw his father there gesticulating, and with his eyes blazing. He had to go on. Besides, the audience had seen him. As he advanced there arose a twittering of curiosity, followed soon by laughter, which grew louder and louder. Melchior had not been wrong, and the boy's garb had all the effect anticipated. The audience rocked with laughter at the sight of the child with his long hair and gipsy complexion timidly trotting across the platform in the evening dress of a man of the world. They got up to see him better. Soon the hilarity was general. There was nothing unkindly in it, but it would have made the most hardened musician lose his head. Christopher, terrified by the noise, and the eyes watching, and the glasses turned upon him, had only one idea : to reach the piano as quickly as possible, for it seemed to him a refuge, an island in the midst of the sea. With head down, looking neither to right nor left, he ran quickly across the platform, and when he reached the middle of it, instead of bowing to the audience, as had been arranged, he turned his back on it, and plunged straight for the piano. The chair was too high for him to sit down without his father's help, and in his distress, instead of waiting, he climbed up on to it on his knees. That increased the merriment of the audience. but now Christopher was safe. Sitting at his instrument, he was afraid of no one.

Melchior came at last. He gained by the good-humour of the audience, who welcomed him with warm applause. The sonata began. The boy played it with imperturbable certainty, with his lips pressed tight in concentration, his eyes fixed on the keys, his little legs hanging down from the chair. He became

more at ease as the notes rolled out ; he was among friends that he knew. A murmur of approbation reached him, and waves of pride and satisfaction surged through him as he thought that all these people were silent to listen to him and to admire him. But hardly had he finished than fear overcame him again, and the applause which greeted him gave him more shame than pleasure. His shame increased when Melchior took him by the hand and advanced with him to the edge of the platform, and made him bow to the public. He obeyed, and bowed very low, with a funny awkwardness ; but he was humiliated, and blushed for what he had done, as though it were a thing ridiculous and ugly.

He had to sit at the piano again, and he played the *Pleasures of Childhood*. Then the audience was enraptured. After each piece they shouted enthusiastically. They wanted him to begin again, and he was proud of his success and at the same time almost hurt by such applause, which was also a command. At the end the whole audience rose to acclaim him ; the Grand Duke led the applause. But as Christopher was now alone on the platform he dared not budge from his seat. The applause redoubled. He bent his head lower and lower, blushing and hang-dog in expression, and he looked steadily away from the audience. Melchior came. He took him in his arms, and told him to blow kisses. He pointed out to him the Grand Duke's box. Christopher turned a deaf ear. Melchior took his arm, and threatened him in a low voice. Then he did as he was told passively, but he did not look at anybody, he did not raise his eyes, but went on turning his head away, and he was un-

happy. He was suffering ; how, he did not know. His vanity was suffering. He did not like the people who were there at all. It was no use their applauding ; he could not forgive them for having laughed and for being amused by his humiliation ; he could not forgive them for having seen him in such a ridiculous position—held in mid-air to blow kisses. He disliked them even for applauding, and when Melchior did at last put him down, he ran away to the wings. A lady threw a bunch of violets up at him as he went. It brushed his face. He was panic-stricken, and ran as fast as he could, turning over a chair that was in his way. The faster he ran the more they laughed, and the more they laughed the faster he ran.

At last he reached the exit, which was filled with people looking at him. He forced his way through, butting, and ran and hid himself at the back of the anteroom. His grandfather was in high feather, and covered him with blessings. The musicians of the orchestra shouted with laughter, and congratulated the boy, who refused to look at them or to shake hands with them. Melchior listened intently, gauging the applause, which had not yet ceased, and wanted to take Christopher on to the stage again. But the boy refused angrily, clung to his grandfather's coat-tails, and kicked at everybody who came near him. At last he burst into tears, and they had to let him be.

Just at this moment an officer came to say that the Grand Duke wished the artists to go to his box. How could the child be presented in such a state ? Melchior swore angrily, and his wrath only had the effect of making Christopher's tears flow faster. To stop them, his grandfather promised him a pound of chocolates if

he would not cry any more, and Christopher, who was greedy, stopped dead, swallowed down his tears, and let them carry him off ; but they had to swear at first most solemnly that they would not take him on to the platform again.

In the anteroom of the Grand Ducal box he was presented to a gentleman in a dress-coat, with a face like a pug-dog, bristling moustaches, and a short, pointed beard—a little red-faced man, inclined to stoutness, who addressed him with bantering familiarity, and called him “Mozart *redivivus* !” This was the Grand Duke. Then he was presented in turn to the Grand Duchess and her daughter, and their suite. But as he did not dare raise his eyes, the only thing he could remember of this brilliant company was a series of gowns and uniforms from the waist down to the feet. He sat on the lap of the young Princess, and dared not move or breathe. She asked him questions, which Melchior answered in an obsequious voice with formal replies, respectful and servile ; but she did not listen to Melchior, and went on teasing the child. He grew redder and redder, and, thinking that everybody must have noticed it, he thought he must explain it away, and said with a long sigh :

“My face is red. I am hot.”

That made the girl shout with laughter. But Christopher did not mind it in her, as he had in his audience just before, for her laughter was pleasant, and she kissed him, and he did not dislike that.

Then he saw his grandfather in the passage at the door of the box, beaming and bashful. The old man was fain to show himself, and also to say a few words, but he dared not, because no one had spoken to him.

He was enjoying his grandson's glory at a distance. Christopher became tender, and felt an irresistible impulse to procure justice also for the old man, so that they should know his worth. His tongue was loosed, and he reached up to the ear of his new friend and whispered to her :

"I will tell you a secret."

She laughed, and said :

"What ?"

"You know," he went on—"you know the pretty *trio* in my *minuetto*, the *minuetto* I played ? . . . You know it ? . . ." (He hummed it gently.) ". . . Well grandfather wrote it, not I. All the other airs are mine. But that is the best. Grandfather wrote it. Grandfather did not want me to say anything. You won't tell anybody ? . . ." (He pointed out the old man.) "That is my grandfather. I love him ; he is very kind to me."

At that the young Princess laughed again, said that he was a darling, covered him with kisses, and, to the consternation of Christopher and his grandfather, told everybody. Everybody laughed then, and the Grand Duke congratulated the old man, who was covered with confusion, tried in vain to explain himself, and stammered like a guilty criminal. But Christopher said not another word to the girl, and in spite of her wheedling he remained dumb and stiff. He despised her for having broken her promise. His idea of Princes suffered considerably from this disloyalty. He was so angry about it that he did not hear anything that was said, or that the Prince had appointed him laughingly his pianist in ordinary, his *Hof Musicus*.

He went out with his relatives, and found himself

surrounded in the corridors of the theatre, and even in the street, with people congratulating him or kissing him. That displeased him greatly, for he did not like being kissed, and did not like people meddling with him without asking his permission.

At last they reached home, and then, hardly was the door closed than Melchior began to call him a "little idiot," because he had said that the *trio* was not his own. As the boy was under the impression that he had done a fine thing, which deserved praise, and not blame, he rebelled, and was impertinent. Melchior lost his temper, and said that he would box his ears, although he had played his music well enough, because with his idiocy he had spoiled the whole effect of the concert. Christopher had a profound sense of justice. He went and sulked in a corner; he visited his contempt upon his father, the Princess, and the whole world. He was hurt also because the neighbours came and congratulated his parents and laughed with them, as if it were they who had played, and as if it were their affair.

At this moment a servant of the Court came with a beautiful gold watch from the Grand Duke and a box of lovely sweets from the young Princess. Both presents gave great pleasure to Christopher, and he did not know which gave him the more; but he was in such a bad temper that he would not admit it to himself, and he went on sulking, scowling at the sweets, and wondering whether he could properly accept a gift from a person who had betrayed his confidence. As he was on the point of giving in his father wanted to set him down at once at the table, and make him write at his dictation a letter of thanks. This was

too much. Either from the nervous strain of the day, or from instinctive shame at beginning the letter, as Melchior wanted him to, with the words, "The little servant and musician—*Knecht und Musicus*—of Your Highness . . ." he burst into tears, and was inconsolable. The servant waited and scoffed. Melchior had to write the letter. That did not make him exactly kindly disposed towards Christopher. As a crowning misfortune, the boy let his watch fall and broke it. A storm of reproaches broke upon him. Melchior shouted that he would have to go without dessert. Christopher said angrily that that was what he wanted. To punish him, Louisa said that she would begin by confiscating his sweets. Christopher was up in arms at that, and said that the box was his, and no one else's, and that no one should take it away from him! He was smacked, and in a fit of anger snatched the box from his mother's hands, hurled it on the floor, and stamped on it. He was whipped, taken to his room, undressed, and put to bed.

In the evening he heard his parents dining with friends—a magnificent repast, prepared a week before in honour of the concert. He was like to die with wrath at such injustice. They laughed loudly, and touched glasses. They had told the guests that the boy was tired, and no one bothered about him. Only after dinner, when the party was breaking up, he heard a slow, shuffling step come into his room, and old Jean Michel bent over his bed and kissed him, and said: "Dear little Christopher! . . ." Then, as if he were ashamed, he went away without another word. He had slipped into his hand some sweetmeats which he had hidden in his pocket.

That softened Christopher ; but he was so tired with all the day's emotions that he had not the strength to think about what his grandfather had done. He had not even the strength to reach out to the good things the old man had given him. He was worn out, and went to sleep almost at once.

His sleep was light. He had acute nervous attacks, like electric shocks, which shook his whole body. In his dreams he was haunted by wild music. He awoke in the night. The Beethoven overture that he had heard at the concert was roaring in his ears. It filled the room with its mighty beat. He sat up in his bed, rubbed his eyes and ears, and asked himself if he were asleep. No ; he was not asleep. He recognized the sound, he recognized those roars of anger, those savage cries ; he heard the throbbing of that passionate heart leaping in his bosom, that tumult of the blood ; he felt on his face the frantic beating of the wind, lashing and destroying, then stopping suddenly, cut off by an Herculean will. That Titanic soul entered his body, blew out his limbs and his soul, and seemed to give them colossal proportions. He strode over all the world. He was like a mountain, and storms raged within him—storms of wrath, storms of sorrow ! . . . Ah, what sorrow ! . . . But they were nothing ! He felt so strong ! . . . To suffer—still to suffer ! . . . Ah, how good it is to be strong ! How good it is to suffer when a man is strong ! . . .

He laughed. His laughter rang out in the silence of the night. His father woke up and cried :

“ Who is there ? ”

His mother whispered :

“ Ssh ! the boy is dreaming ! ”

All then were silent ; round them all was silence. The music died away, and nothing sounded but the regular breathing of the human creatures asleep in the room, comrades in misery, borne together by Fate in the same frail barque, bound onwards by a wild whirling force through the night.

(John Christopher's letter to the Grand Duke Leopold is inspired by Beethoven's letter to the Prince Elector of Bonn, written when he was eleven.)

PART II

MORNING

I

THE DEATH OF JEAN MICHEL

YEARS have passed. Christopher is nearly eleven. His musical education is proceeding. He is learning harmony with Florian Holzer, the organist of St. Martin's, a friend of his grandfather's, a very learned man, who teaches him that the chords and series of chords that he most loves, and the harmonies which softly greet his heart and ear, those that he cannot hear without a little thrill running down his spine, are bad and forbidden. When he asks why, no reply is forthcoming but that it is so; the rules forbid them. As he is naturally in revolt against discipline, he loves them only the more. His delight is to find examples of them in the great and admired musicians, and to take them to his grandfather or his master. His grandfather replies that in the great musicians they are admirable, and that Beethoven and Bach can take any liberty. His master, less conciliatory, is angry, and says acidly that the masters did better things.

Christopher has a free pass for the concerts and the theatre. He has learned to play every instrument a little. He is already quite skilful with the violin, and his father procured him a seat in the orchestra. He acquitted himself so well there that after a few months'

probation he was officially appointed second violin in the *Hof Musik Verein*. He has begun to earn his living. Not too soon either, for affairs at home have gone from bad to worse. Melchior's intemperance has swamped him, and his grandfather is growing old.

Christopher has taken in the melancholy situation. He is already as grave and anxious as a man. He fulfils his task valiantly, though it does not interest him, and he is apt to fall asleep in the orchestra in the evenings, because it is late and he is tired. The theatre no longer rouses in him the emotion it used to do when he was little. When he was little—four years ago—his greatest ambition had been to occupy the place that he now held. But now he dislikes most of the music he is made to play. He dare not yet pronounce judgment upon it, but he does find it foolish; and if by chance they do play lovely things, he is displeased by the carelessness with which they are rendered, and his best-beloved works are made to appear like his neighbours and colleagues in the orchestra, who, as soon as the curtain has fallen, when they have done with blowing and scraping, mop their brows and smile and chatter quietly, as though they had just finished an hour's gymnastics. And he has been close to his former flame, the fair bare-footed singer. He meets her quite often during the *entr'acte* in the saloon. She knows that he was once in love with her, and she kisses him often. That gives him no pleasure. He is disgusted by her paint and scent, and her fat arms and her greediness. He hates her now.

The Grand Duke did not forget his pianist in ordinary. Not that the small pension which was granted to him with this title was regularly paid—it had to be

asked for—but from time to time Christopher used to receive orders to go to the Palace when there were distinguished guests, or simply when Their Highnesses took it into their heads that they wanted to hear him. It was almost always in the evening, at the time when Christopher wanted to be alone. He had to leave everything and hurry off. Sometimes he was made to wait in the anteroom, because dinner was not finished. The servants, accustomed to see him, used to address him familiarly. Then he would be led into a great room full of mirrors and lights, in which well-fed men and women used to stare at him with horrid curiosity. He had to cross the waxed floor to kiss Their Highnesses' hands, and the more he grew the more awkward he became, for he felt that he was in a ridiculous position, and his pride used to suffer.

When it was all done he used to sit at the piano and have to play for these idiots. He thought them idiots. There were moments when their indifference so oppressed him as he played that he was often like to stop in the middle of a piece. There was no air about him ; he was near suffocation ; he was like to lose his senses. When he was finished he was overwhelmed with congratulations and laden with compliments ; he was introduced all round. He thought they looked at him like some strange animal in the Prince's menagerie, and that the words of praise were addressed rather to his master than to himself. He thought himself brought low, and he developed a morbid sensibility from which he suffered the more as he dared not show it. He saw offence in the most simple actions. If anyone laughed in a corner of the room, he imagined himself to be the cause of it, and he knew not whether

it were his manners, or his clothes, or his person, or his hands, or his feet, that caused the laughter. He was humiliated by everything. He was humiliated if people did not talk to him, humiliated if they did, humiliated if they gave him sweets like a child, humiliated especially when the Grand Duke, as sometimes happened, in princely fashion dismissed him by pressing a piece of money into his hand. He was wretched at being poor, and at being treated as a poor boy. One evening, as he was going home, the money that he had received weighed so heavily upon him that he threw it through a cellar window, and then immediately he would have done anything to get it back, for at home there was a month's old account with the butcher to pay.

His relatives never suspected these injuries to his pride. They were delighted at his favour with the Prince. Poor Louisa could conceive of nothing finer for her son than these evenings at the Palace in splendid society. As for Melchior, he used to brag of it continually to his boon-fellows. But Christopher's grandfather was happier than any. He pretended to be independent and democratic, and to despise greatness, but he had a simple admiration for money, power, honours, social distinction, and he took unbounded pride in seeing his grandson moving among those who had these things. He delighted in them as though such glory was a reflection upon himself, and in spite of all his efforts to appear calm and indifferent, his face used to glow. On the evenings when Christopher went to the Palace, old Jean Michel used always to contrive to stay about the house on some pretext or another. He used to await his grandson's return with

childish impatience, and when Christopher came in he would begin at once with a careless air to ply him with seeming idle questions, such as :

“ Well, did things go well to-night ?”

Or he would make little hints like :

“ Here’s our Christopher ; he can tell us some news.”

Or he would produce some ingenious compliment by way of flattery

“ Here’s our young nobleman !”

But Christopher, out of sorts and out of temper, would reply with a curt “ Good-evening !” and go and sulk in a corner. But the old man would persist, and ply him with more direct questions, to which the boy replied only “ Yes,” or “ No.” Then the others would join in and ask for details. Christopher would look more and more thunderous. They had to drag the words from his lips until Jean Michel would lose his temper and hurl insults at him. Then Christopher would reply with scant respect, and the end would be a rumpus. The old man would go out and slam the door. So Christopher spoiled the joy of these poor people, who had no inkling of the cause of his bad temper. It was not their fault if they had the souls of servants, and never dreamed that it is possible to be otherwise.

Christopher was turned into himself, and though he never judged his family, yet he felt a gulf between himself and them. No doubt he exaggerated what lay between them, and in spite of their different ways of thought it is quite probable that they could have understood each other if he had been able to talk intimately to them. But it is known that nothing is

more difficult than absolute intimacy between children and parents, even when there is much love between them, for on the one side respect discourages confidence, and on the other the idea, often erroneous, of the superiority of age and experience prevents them taking seriously enough the child's feelings, which are often just as interesting as those of grown-up persons, and almost always more sincere.

But the people that Christopher saw at home and the conversation that he heard there widened the distance between himself and his family.

Melchior's friends used to frequent the house—mostly musicians of the orchestra, single men and hard drinkers. They were not bad fellows, but vulgar. They made the house shake with their footsteps and their laughter. They loved music, but they spoke of it with a stupidity that was revolting. The coarse indiscretion of their enthusiasm wounded the boy's modesty of feeling. When they praised a work that he loved it was as though they were insulting him personally. He would stiffen himself, and grow pale, frozen, and pretend not to take any interest in music. He would have hated it had that been possible. Melchior used to say :

"The fellow has no heart. He feels nothing. I don't know where he gets it from."

Sometimes they used to sing German four-part songs—four-footed as well—and these were all exactly like themselves—slow-moving, solemn and broad, fashioned of dull melodies. Then Christopher used to fly to the most distant room and hurl insults at the wall.

His grandfather also had friends : the organist, the furniture-dealer, the watch-maker, the contrabass—

garrulous old men, who used always to pass round the same jokes and plunge into interminable discussions on art, politics, or the family trees of the country-side, much less interested in the subjects of which they talked than happy to talk and to find an audience.

As for Louisa, she used only to see some of her neighbours who brought her the gossip of the place, and at rare intervals a "kind lady," who, under pretext of taking an interest in her, used to come and engage her services for a dinner-party, and pretend to watch over the religious education of the children.

But of all who came to the house, none was more repugnant to Christopher than his Uncle Theodore, a stepson of his grandfather's, a son by a former marriage of his grandmother Clara, Jean Michel's first wife. He was a partner in a great commercial house which did business in Africa and the Far East. He was the exact type of one of those Germans of the new style, whose affectation it is scoffingly to repudiate the old idealism of the race, and, intoxicated by conquest, to maintain a cult of strength and success which shows that they are not accustomed to seeing them on their side. But as it is difficult at once to change the age-old nature of a people, the despised idealism springs up again in him at every turn in language, manners, and moral habits, and the quotations from Goethe to fit the smallest incidents of domestic life, and he was a singular compound of conscience and self-interest. There was in him a curious effort to reconcile the honest principles of the old German *bourgeoisie* with the cynicism of these new commercial *condottieri*—a compound which for ever gave out a repulsive flavour of hypocrisy, for ever striving to make of German

strength, avarice, and self-interest the symbols of all right, justice, and truth.

Christopher's loyalty was deeply injured by all this. He could not tell whether his uncle were right or no, but he hated him, and marked him down for an enemy. His grandfather had no great love for him either, and was in revolt against his theories ; but he was easily crushed in argument by Theodore's fluency, which was never hard put to it to turn into ridicule the old man's simple generosity. In the end Jean Michel came to be ashamed of his own good-heartedness, and by way of showing that he was not so much behind the times as they thought, he used to try to talk like Theodore ; but the words came hollow from his lips, and he was ill at ease with them. Whatever he may have thought of him, Theodore did impress him. He felt respect for such practical skill, which he admired the more for knowing himself to be absolutely incapable of it. He used to dream of putting one of his grandsons to similar work. That was Melchior's idea also. He intended to make Rodolphe follow in his uncle's footsteps. And so the whole family set itself to flatter this rich relation of whom they expected help. He, seeing that he was necessary to them, took advantage of it to cut a fine masterful figure. He meddled in everything, gave advice upon everything, and made no attempt to conceal his contempt for art and artists. Rather, he blazoned it abroad for the mere pleasure of humiliating his musicianly relations, and he used to indulge in stupid jokes at their expense, and the cowards used to laugh.

Christopher, especially, was singled out as a butt for his uncle's jests. He was not patient under them.

He would say nothing, but he used to grind his teeth angrily, and his uncle used to laugh at his speechless rage. But one day, when Theodore went too far in his teasing, Christopher, losing control of himself, spat in his face. It was a fearful affair. The insult was so monstrous that his uncle was at first paralyzed by it ; then words came back to him, and he broke out into a flood of abuse. Christopher sat petrified by the enormity of the thing that he had done, and did not even feel the blows that rained down upon him ; but when they tried to force him down on his knees before his uncle, he broke away, jostled his mother away, and ran out of the house. He did not stop until he could breathe no more, and then he was right out in the country. He heard voices calling him, and he debated within himself whether he had not better throw himself into the river, since he could not do so with his enemy. He spent the night in the fields. At dawn he went and knocked at his grandfather's door. The old man had been so upset by Christopher's disappearance—he had not slept for it—that he had not the heart to scold him. He took him home, and then nothing was said to him, because it was apparent that he was still in an excited condition, and they had to smooth him down, for he had to play at the Palace that evening. But for several weeks Melchior continued to overwhelm him with his complaints, addressed to nobody in particular, about the trouble that a man has taken to give an example of an irreproachable life and good manners to unworthy creatures who dishonoured him. And when his Uncle Theodore met him in the street, he turned his head and held his nose by way of showing his extreme disgust.

Finding so little sympathy at home, Christopher spent as little time there as possible. He chafed against the continual restraint which they strove to set upon him. There were too many things, too many people, that he had to respect, and he was never allowed to ask why, and Christopher did not possess the bump of respect. The more they tried to discipline him and to turn him into an honest little German *bourgeois*, the more he felt the need of breaking free from it all. It would have been his pleasure after the dull, tedious, formal performances which he had to attend in the orchestra or at the Palace to roll in the grass like a fowl, and to slide down the grassy slope on the seat of his new trousers, or to have a stone-fight with the urchins of the neighbourhood. It was not because he was afraid of scoldings and thwackings that he did not do these things more often, but because he had no playmates. He could not get on with other children. Even the little guttersnipes did not like playing with him, because he took every game too seriously, and struck too lustily. He had grown used to being driven in on himself, and to living apart from children of his own age. He was ashamed of not being clever at games, and dared not take part in their sport. And he used to pretend to take no interest in it, although he was consumed by the desire to be asked to play with them. But they never said anything to him, and then he would go away hurt, but assuming indifference.

He found consolation in wandering with Uncle Gottfried when he was in the neighbourhood. He became more and more friendly with him, and sympathized with his independent temper. He understood so well

now Gottfried's delight in tramping the roads without a tie in the world ! Often they used to go out together in the evening into the country, straight on, aimlessly, and as Gottfried always forgot the time, they used to come back very late, and then were scolded. Gottfried knew that it was wrong, but Christopher used to implore, and he could not himself resist the pleasure of it. About midnight he would stand in front of the house and whistle, an agreed signal. Christopher would be in his bed fully dressed. He would slip out with his shoes in his hand, and, holding his breath, creep with all the artful skill of a savage to the kitchen window, which opened on to the road. He would climb on to the table ; Gottfried would take him on his shoulders, and then off they would go, happy as truants.

Sometimes they would go and seek out Jeremy the fisherman, a friend of Gottfried's, and then they would slip out in his boat under the moon. The water dropping from the oars gave out little arpeggios, then chromatic scales. A milky vapour hung tremulous over the surface of the waters. The stars quivered. The cocks called to each other from either bank, and sometimes in the depths of the sky they heard the trilling of larks, ascending from earth, deceived by the light of the moon. They were silent. Gottfried hummed a tune. Jeremy told strange tales of the lives of the beasts—tales that gained in mystery from the curt and enigmatic manner of their telling. The moon hid herself behind the woods. They skirted the black mass of the hills. The darkness of the water and the sky mingled. There was never a ripple on the water. Sounds died down. The boat glided

through the night. Was she gliding? Was she moving? Was she still? . . . The reeds parted with a sound like the rustling of silk. They grounded noiselessly. They climbed out on to the bank, and returned on foot. They would not return until dawn. They followed the river-bank. Clouds of silver ablets, green as ears of corn, or blue as jewels, teemed in the first light of the day. They swarmed like the serpents of Medusa's head, and flung themselves greedily at the bread thrown to them; they plunged for it as it sank, and turned in spirals, and then darted away in a flash, like a ray of light. The river took on rosy and purple hues of reflection. The birds woke one after another. They hurried back. Just as carefully as when they had set out they returned to the room, with its thick atmosphere, and Christopher, worn out, fell into bed, and slept at once, with his body sweet-smelling with the smell of the fields.

All was well, and nothing would have been known, but that one day Ernest, his younger brother, betrayed Christopher's midnight sallies. From that moment they were forbidden, and he was watched. But he contrived to escape, and he preferred the society of the little pedlar and his friends to any other. His family was scandalized. Melchior said that he had the tastes of a labourer. Old Jean Michel was jealous of Christopher's affection for Gottfried, and he used to lecture him about lowering himself so far as to like such vulgar company when he had the honour of mixing with the best people and of being the servant of Princes. It was considered that Christopher was lacking in dignity and self-respect.

In spite of the penury which increased with Melchior's intemperance and folly, life was tolerable as long as Jean Michel was there. He was the only creature who had any influence over Melchior, and could hold him back to a certain extent from his vice. The esteem in which he was generally held did serve to pass over the drunkard's freaks, and he used constantly to come to the aid of the household with money. Besides the modest pension which he enjoyed as retired *Kapellmeister*, he was still able to earn small sums by giving lessons and tuning pianos. He gave most of it to his daughter-in-law, for he perceived her difficulties, though she strove to hide them from him. Louisa hated the idea that he was denying himself for them, and it was all the more to the old man's credit that he had always been accustomed to a large way of living, and had great needs to satisfy. Sometimes even his sacrifices were not sufficient, and to meet some urgent debt Jean Michel would have secretly to sell a piece of furniture, or books, or some relic that he set store by. Melchior knew that his father made presents to Louisa that were concealed from himself, and very often he would lay hands on them, in spite of protest. But when this came to the old man's ears—not from Louisa, who said nothing of her troubles to him, but from one of his grandchildren—he would fly into a terrible passion, and there were frightful scenes between the two men. They were both extraordinarily violent, and they would come to round oaths and threats—almost it seemed as though they would come to blows. But even in his most angry passion respect would hold Melchior in check, and, however drunk he might be, in the end he would bow his head to the torrent of insults

and humiliating reproach which his father poured out upon him. But for that he did not cease to watch for the first opportunity of breaking out again, and with his thoughts on the future Jean Michel would be filled with melancholy and anxious fears.

"My poor children," he used to say to Louisa, "what will become of you when I am no longer here? . . . Fortunately," he would add, fondling Christopher, "I can go on until this fellow pulls you out of the mire." But he was out in his reckoning; he was at the end of his road. No one would have suspected it. He was surprisingly strong. He was past eighty; he had a full head of hair, a white mane, still grey in patches, and in his thick beard were still black hairs. He had only about ten teeth left, but with these he could chew lustily. It was a pleasure to see him at table. He had a hearty appetite, and though he reproached Melchior for drinking, he always emptied his bottle himself. He had a preference for white Moselle. For the rest—wine, beer, cider—he could do justice to all the good things that the Lord hath made. He was not so foolish as to lose his reason in his cups, and he kept to his allowance. It is true that it was a plentiful allowance, and that a feebler intelligence must have been made drunk by it. He was strong of foot and eye, and indefatigably active. He got up at six, and performed his ablutions scrupulously, for he cared for his appearance and respected his person. He lived alone in his house, of which he was sole occupant, and never let his daughter-in-law meddle with his affairs. He cleaned out his room, made his own coffee, sewed on his buttons, nailed, and glued, and altered; and going to and fro and up and down stairs in his shirt-sleeves,

he never stopped singing in a sounding bass which he loved to let ring out as he accompanied himself with operatic gestures. And then he used to go out in all weathers. He went about his business, omitting none, but he was not often punctual. He was to be seen at every street corner arguing with some acquaintance or joking with some woman whose face he had remembered, for he loved pretty women and old friends. And so he was always late, and never knew the time. But he never let the dinner-hour slip by. He dined wherever he might be, inviting himself, and he would not go home until late—after nightfall, after a visit to his grandchildren. Then he would go to bed, and before he went to sleep read a page of his old Bible, and during the night—for he never slept for more than an hour or two together—he would get up to take down one of his old books, bought second-hand—history, theology, belles-lettres, or science. He used to read at random a few pages, which interested and bored him, and he did not rightly understand them, though he did not skip a word, until sleep came to him again. On Sunday he would go to church, walk with the children, and play bowls. He had never been ill, except for a little gout in his toes, which used to make him swear at night while he was reading his Bible. It seemed as though he might live to be a hundred, and he himself could see no reason why he should not live longer. When people said that he would die a centenarian, he used to think, like another illustrious old man, that no limit can be appointed to the goodness of Providence. The only sign that he was growing old was that he was more easily brought to tears, and was becoming every day more irritable.

The smallest impatience with him could throw him into a violent fury. His red face and short neck would grow redder than ever. He would stutter angrily, and have to stop, choking. The family doctor, an old friend, had warned him to take care and to moderate both his anger and his appetite. But with an old man's obstinacy he plunged into acts of still greater recklessness out of bravado, and he laughed at medicine and doctors. He pretended to despise death, and did not mince his language when he declared that he was not afraid of it.

One summer day, when it was very hot, and he had drunk copiously, and argued in the market-place, he went home and began to work quietly in his garden. He loved digging. Bare-headed under the sun, still irritated by his argument, he dug angrily. Christopher was sitting in the arbour with a book in his hand, but he was not reading. He was dreaming and listening to the cheeping of the crickets, and mechanically following his grandfather's movements. The old man's back was towards him ; he was bending and plucking out weeds. Suddenly Christopher saw him rise, beat against the air with his arms, and fall heavily with his face to the ground. For a moment he wanted to laugh ; then he saw that the old man did not stir. He called to him, ran to him, and shook him with all his strength. Fear seized him. He knelt, and with his two hands tried to raise the great head from the ground. It was so heavy and he trembled so that he could hardly move it. But when he saw the eyes turned up, white and bloody, he was frozen with horror, and he let the head fall with a shrill cry. He got up in terror, ran away, and out of the place. He cried and

wept. A man passing by stopped the boy. Christopher could not speak, but he pointed to the house. The man went in, and Christopher followed him. Others had heard his cries, and they came from the neighbouring houses. Soon the garden was full of people. They trampled the flowers, and bent down over the old man. They cried aloud. Two or three men lifted him up. Christopher stayed by the gate, turned to the wall, and hid his face in his hands. He was afraid to look, but he could not help himself, and when they passed him he saw through his fingers the old man's huge body, limp and flabby. One arm dragged along the ground, the head, leaning against the knee of one of the men carrying the body, bobbed at every step, and the face was scarred, covered with mud, bleeding. The mouth was open and the eyes were fearful. He howled again, and took to flight. He ran as though something were after him, and never stopped until he reached home. He burst into the kitchen with frightful cries. Louisa was cleaning vegetables. He hurled himself at her, and hugged her desperately, imploring her help. His face was distorted with his sobs ; he could hardly speak. But at the first word she understood. She went white, let the things fall from her hands, and without a word rushed from the house.

Christopher was left alone, crouching against a cupboard. He went on weeping. His brothers were playing. He could not make out quite what had happened. He did not think of his grandfather ; he was thinking only of the dreadful sights he had just seen, and he was in terror lest he should be made to return to see them again.

And as it turned out in the evening, when the other children, tired of doing every sort of mischief in the house, were beginning to feel wearied and hungry, Louisa rushed in again, took them by the hand, and led them to their grandfather's house. She walked very fast, and Ernest and Rodolphe tried to complain, as usual ; but Louisa bade them be silent in such a tone of voice that they held their peace. An instinctive fear seized them, and when they entered the house they began to weep. It was not yet night. The last hours of the sunset cast strange lights over the inside of the house—on the door-handle, on the mirror, on the violin hung on the wall in the chief room, which was half in darkness. But in the old man's room a candle was alight, and the flickering flame, vying with the livid, dying day, made the heavy darkness of the room more oppressive. Melchior was sitting near the window, loudly weeping. The doctor, leaning over the bed, hid from sight what was lying there. Christopher's heart beat so that it was like to break. Louisa made the children kneel at the foot of the bed. Christopher stole a glance. He expected something so terrifying after what he had seen in the afternoon that at the first glimpse he was almost comforted. His grandfather lay motionless, and seemed to be asleep. For a moment the child believed that the old man was better, and that all was at an end. But when he heard his heavy breathing ; when, as he looked closer, he saw the swollen face, on which the wound that he had come by in the fall had made a broad scar ; when he understood that here was a man at point of death, he began to tremble ; and while he repeated Louisa's prayer for the restoration of his grandfather, in his

heart he prayed that if the old man could not get well he might be already dead. He was terrified at the prospect of what was going to happen.

The old man had not been conscious since the moment of his fall. He only returned to consciousness for a moment, enough to learn his condition, and that was lamentable. The priest was there, and recited the last prayers over him. They raised the old man on his pillow. He opened his eyes slowly, and they seemed no longer to obey his will. He breathed noisily, and with unseeing eyes looked at the faces and the lights, and suddenly he opened his mouth. A nameless terror showed on his features.

"But then . . .," he gasped—"but I am going to die!"

The awful sound of his voice pierced Christopher's heart. Never, never was it to fade from his memory. The old man said no more. He moaned like a little child. The stupor took him once more, but his breathing became more and more difficult. He groaned, he fidgeted with his hands, he seemed to struggle against the mortal sleep. In his semi-consciousness he cried once :

"Mother!"

Oh, the biting impression that it made, this mumbling of the old man, calling in anguish on his mother, as Christopher would himself have done—his mother, of whom he was never known to talk in life, to whom he now turned instinctively, the last futile refuge in the last terror! . . . Then he seemed to be comforted for a moment. He had once more a flicker of consciousness. His heavy eyes, the pupils of which seemed to move aimlessly, met those of the boy frozen

in his fear. They lit up. The old man tried to smile and speak. Louisa took Christopher and led him to the bedside. Jean Michel moved his lips, and tried to caress his head with his hand, but then he fell back into his torpor. It was the end.

They sent the children into the next room, but they had too much to do to worry about them, and Christopher, under the attraction of the horror of it, peeped through the half-open door at the tragic face on the pillow ; the man strangled by the firm clutch that had him by the neck ; the face which grew ever more hollow as he watched ; the sinking of the creature into the void, which seemed to suck it down like a pump ; and the horrible death-rattle, the mechanical breathing, like a bubble of air bursting on the surface of waters ; the last efforts of the body, which strives to live when the soul is no longer. Then the head fell on one side on the pillow. All, all was silence.

A few moments later, in the midst of the sobs and prayers and the confusion caused by the death, Louisa saw the child, pale, wide-eyed, with gaping mouth, clutching convulsively at the handle of the door. She ran to him. He had a seizure in her arms. She carried him away. He lost consciousness. He woke up to find himself in his bed. He howled in terror, because he had been left alone for a moment, had another seizure, and fainted again. For the rest of the night and the next day he was in a fever. Finally, he grew calm, and on the next night fell into a deep sleep, which lasted until the middle of the following day. He felt that someone was walking in his room, that his mother was leaning over his bed and kissing him. He thought he heard the sweet distant

sound of bells. But he would not stir ; he was in a dream.

When he opened his eyes again his Uncle Gottfried was sitting at the foot of his bed. Christopher was worn out, and could remember nothing. Then his memory returned, and he began to weep. Gottfried got up and kissed him.

“ Well, my boy—well ?” he said gently.

“ Oh, uncle, uncle !” sobbed the boy, clinging to him.

“ Cry, then . . . ,” said Gottfried. “ Cry !”

He also was weeping.

When he was a little comforted Christopher dried his eyes and looked at Gottfried. Gottfried understood that he wanted to ask something.

“ No,” he said, putting a finger to his lips, “ you must not talk. It is good to cry, bad to talk.”

The boy insisted.

“ It is no good.”

“ Only one thing—only one ! . . .”

“ What ?”

Christopher hesitated.

“ O uncle !” he asked, “ where is he now ?”

Gottfried answered :

“ He is with the Lord, my boy.”

But that was not what Christopher had asked.

“ No ; you do not understand. Where is he—he *himself* ?”

(He meant the body.)

He went on in a trembling voice :

“ Is *he* still in the house ?”

“ They buried the good man this morning,” said Gottfried. “ Did you not hear the bells ?”

Christopher was comforted. Then, when he thought that he would never see his beloved grandfather again, he wept once more bitterly.

"Poor little beast!" said Gottfried, looking pityingly at the child.

Christopher expected Gottfried to console him, but Gottfried made no attempt to do so, knowing that it was useless.

"Uncle Gottfried," asked the boy, "are not you afraid of it, too?"

(Much did he wish that Gottfried should not have been afraid, and would tell him the secret of it!)

"'Ssh!" he said, in a troubled voice. . . .

"And how is one not to be afraid?" he said, after a moment. "But what can one do? It is so. One must put up with it."

Christopher shook his head in protest.

"One has to put up with it, my boy," said Gottfried. "*He* ordered it up yonder. One has to love what *He* has ordered."

"I hate Him!" said Christopher, angrily shaking his fist at the sky.

Gottfried fearfully bade him be silent. Christopher himself was afraid of what he had just said, and he began to pray with Gottfried. But the blood boiled in his heart, and as he repeated the words of servile humility and resignation there was in his inmost heart a feeling of passionate revolt and horror of the abominable thing and the monstrous Being who had been able to create it.

Days passed and nights of rain over the freshly-turned earth under which lay the remains of poor old

Jean Michel. At the moment Melchior wept and cried and sobbed much, but the week was not out before Christopher heard him laughing heartily. When the name of the dead man was pronounced in his presence, his face grew longer and a lugubrious expression came into it, but in a moment he would begin to talk and gesticulate excitedly. He was sincerely afflicted, but it was impossible for him to remain sad for long.

Louisa, passive and resigned, accepted the misfortune as she accepted everything. She added a prayer to her daily prayers ; she went regularly to the cemetery, and cared for the grass as if it were part of her household.

Gottfried paid touching attention to the little patch of ground where the old man slept. When he came to the neighbourhood, he brought a little souvenir—a cross that he had made, or flowers that Jean Michel had loved. He never missed, even if he were only in the town for a few hours, and he did it by stealth.

Sometimes Louisa took Christopher with her on her visits to the cemetery. Christopher revolted in disgust against the fat patch of earth clad in its sinister adornment of flowers and trees, and against the heavy scent which mounts to the sun, mingling with the breath of the sonorous cypress. But he dared not confess his disgust, because he condemned it in himself as cowardly and impious. He was very unhappy. His grandfather's death haunted him incessantly, and yet he had long known what death was, and had thought about it and been afraid of it. But he had never before seen it, and he who sees it for the first time learns that he knew nothing, neither of death nor of life. One moment brings everything tottering.

Reason is of no avail. You thought you were alive, you thought you had some experience of life ; you see then that you knew nothing, that you have been living in a veil of illusions spun by your own mind to hide from your eyes the awful countenance of reality. There is no connection between the idea of suffering and the creature who bleeds and suffers. There is no connection between the idea of death and the convulsions of body and soul in combat and in death. Human language, human wisdom, are only a puppet-show of stiff mechanical dolls by the side of the grim charm of reality and the creatures of mind and blood, whose desperate and vain efforts are strained to the fixing of a life which crumbles away with every day.

Christopher thought of death day and night. Memories of the last agony pursued him. He heard that horrible breathing ; every night, whatever he might be doing, he saw his grandfather again. All Nature was changed ; it seemed as though there were an icy vapour drawn over her. Round him, everywhere, whichever way he turned, he felt upon his face the fatal breathing of the blind, all-powerful Beast ; he felt himself in the grip of that fearful destructive Form, and he felt that there was nothing to be done. But, far from crushing him, the thought of it set him aflame with hate and indignation. He was never resigned to it. He butted head down against the impossible ; it mattered nothing that he broke his head, and was forced to realize that he was not the stronger. He never ceased to revolt against suffering. From that time on his life was an unceasing struggle against the savagery of a Fate which he could not admit.

The very misery of his life afforded him relief from the obsession of his thoughts. The ruin of his family, which only Jean Michel had withheld, proceeded apace when he was removed. With him the Kraffts had lost their chief means of support, and misery entered the house.

Melchior increased it. Far from working more, he abandoned himself utterly to his vice when he was free of the only force that had held him in check. Almost every night he returned home drunk, and he never brought back his earnings. Besides, he had lost almost all his lessons. One day he had appeared at the house of one of his pupils in a state of complete intoxication, and, as a consequence of this scandal, all doors were closed to him. He was only tolerated in the orchestra out of regard for the memory of his father, but Louisa trembled lest he should be dismissed any day after a scene. He had already been threatened with it on several evenings when he had turned up in his place about the end of the performance.

Twice or thrice he had forgotten altogether to put in an appearance. And of what was he not capable in those moments of stupid excitement when he was taken with the itch to do and say idiotic things! Had he not taken it into his head one evening to try and play his great violin concerto in the middle of an act of the *Valkyrie*? They were hard put to it to stop him. Sometimes, too, he would shout with laughter in the middle of a performance at the amusing pictures that were presented on the stage or whirling in his own brain. He was a joy to his colleagues, and they passed over many things because he was so funny. But such indulgence was worse

than severity, and Christopher could have died for shame.

The boy was now first violin in the orchestra. He sat so that he could watch over his father, and, when necessary, beseech him, and make him be silent. It was not easy, and the best thing was not to pay any attention to him, for if he did, as soon as the sot felt that eyes were upon him, he would take to making faces or launch out into a speech. Then Christopher would turn away, trembling with fear lest he should commit some outrageous prank. He would try to be absorbed in his work, but he could not help hearing Melchior's utterances and the laughter of his colleagues. Tears would come into his eyes. The musicians, good fellows that they were, had seen that, and were sorry for him. They would hush their laughter, and only talk about his father when Christopher was not by. But Christopher was conscious of their pity. He knew that as soon as he had gone their jokes would break out again, and that Melchior was the laughing-stock of the town. He could not stop him, and he was in torment. He used to bring his father home after the play. He would take his arm, put up with his pleasantries, and try to conceal the stumbling in his walk. But he deceived no one, and in spite of all his efforts it was very rarely that he could succeed in leading Melchior all the way home. At the corner of the street Melchior would declare that he had an urgent appointment with some friends, and no argument could dissuade him from keeping this engagement. He took care not to insist too much, so as not to expose himself to a scene and paternal imprecations which might attract the neighbours to their windows.

All the household money slipped away in this fashion. Melchior was not satisfied with drinking away his earnings; he drank away all that his wife and son so hardly earned. Louisa used to weep, but she dared not resist, since her husband had harshly reminded her that nothing in the house belonged to her, and that he had married her without a sou. Christopher tried to resist. Melchior boxed his ears, treated him like a naughty child, and took the money out of his hands. The boy was twelve or thirteen. He was strong, and was beginning to kick against being beaten; but he was still afraid to rebel, and rather than expose himself to fresh humiliations of the kind he let himself be plundered. The only resource that Louisa and Christopher had was to hide their money; but Melchior was singularly ingenious in discovering their hiding-places when they were not there.

Soon that was not enough for him. He sold the things that he had inherited from his father. Christopher sadly saw the precious relics go—the books, the bed, the furniture, the portraits of musicians. He could say nothing. But one day, when Melchior had crashed into Jean Michel's old piano, he swore as he rubbed his knee, and said that there was no longer room to move about in his own house, and that he would rid the house of all such gimcrackery. Christopher cried aloud. It was true that the rooms were too full, since all Jean Michel's belongings were crowded into them, so as to be able to sell the house, that dear house in which Christopher had spent the happiest hours of his childhood. It was true also that the old piano was not worth much, that it was husky in tone,

and that for long enough Christopher had not used it, since he played on the fine new piano due to the generosity of the Prince ; but however old and useless it might be, it was Christopher's best friend. It had awakened the child to the boundless world of music ; on its worn yellow keys he had discovered with his fingers the kingdom of sounds and its laws ; it had been his grandfather's work (months had gone to repairing it for his grandson), and he was proud of it ; it was in some sort a holy relic, and Christopher protested that his father had no right to sell it. Melchior bade him be silent. Christopher cried louder than ever that the piano was his, and that he forbade anyone to touch it ; but Melchior looked at him with an evil smile, and said nothing.

Next day Christopher had forgotten the affair. He came home tired, but in a fairly good temper. He was struck by the sly looks of his brothers. They pretended to be absorbed in their books, but they followed him with their eyes, and watched all his movements, and bent over their books again when he looked at them. He had no doubt that they had played some trick upon him, but he was used to that, and did not worry about it, but determined, when he had found it out, to give them a good thrashing, as he always did on such occasions. He scorned to look into the matter, and he began to talk to his father, who was sitting by the fire, and questioned him as to the doings of the day with an affectation of interest which suited him but ill ; and while he talked he saw that Melchior was exchanging stealthy nods and winks with the two children. Something caught at his heart. He ran into his room. The place where the piano had

stood was empty ! He gave a cry of anguish. In the next room he heard the stifled laughter of his brothers. The blood rushed to his face. He rushed in to them, and cried :

“ My piano ! ”

Melchior raised his head with an air of calm bewilderment which made the children roar with laughter. He could not contain himself when he saw Christopher's piteous look, and he turned aside to guffaw. Christopher no longer knew what he was doing. He hurled himself like a mad thing on his father. Melchior, lolling in his chair, had no time to protect himself. The boy seized him by the throat and cried :

“ Thief ! Thief ! ”

It was only for a moment. Melchior shook himself, and sent Christopher rolling down on to the tile floor, though in his fury he was clinging to him like grim death. The boy's head crashed against the tiles. Christopher got upon his knees. He was livid, and he went on saying in a choking voice :

“ Thief, thief ! . . . You are robbing us—mother and me. . . . Thief ! . . . You are selling my grandfather ! ”

Melchior rose to his feet, and held his fist above Christopher's head. The boy stared at him with hate in his eyes. He was trembling with rage. Melchior began to tremble, too. He sat down, and hid his face in his hands. The two children had run away screaming. Silence followed the uproar. Melchior groaned and mumbled. Christopher, against the wall, never ceased glaring at him with clenched teeth, and he trembled in every limb. Melchior began to blame himself.

"I am a thief! I rob my family! My children despise me! It were better if I were dead!"

When he had finished whining, Christopher did not budge, but asked him harshly:

"Where is the piano?"

"At Wormser's," said Melchior, not daring to look at him.

Christopher took a step forward, and said:

"The money!"

Melchior, crushed, took the money from his pocket and gave it to his son. Christopher turned towards the door. Melchior called him:

"Christopher!"

Christopher stopped. Melchior went on in a quavering voice:

"Dear Christopher . . . do not despise me!"

Christopher flung his arms round his neck and sobbed:

"No, father—dear father! I do not despise you! I am so unhappy!"

They wept loudly. Melchior lamented:

"It is not my fault. I am not bad. That's true, Christopher? I am not bad?"

He promised that he would drink no more. Christopher wagged his head doubtfully, and Melchior admitted that he could not resist it when he had money in his hands. Christopher thought for a moment and said:

"You see, father, we must . . ."

He stopped.

"What then?"

"I am ashamed . . ."

"Of whom?" asked Melchior naively.

“Of you.”

Melchior made a face and said :

“That’s nothing.”

Christopher explained that they would have to put all the family money, even Melchior’s contribution, into the hands of someone else, who would dole it out to Melchior day by day, or week by week, as he needed it. Melchior, who was in humble mood—he was not altogether starving—agreed to the proposition, and declared that he would then and there write a letter to the Grand Duke to ask that the pension which came to him should be regularly paid over in his name to Christopher. Christopher refused, blushing for his father’s humiliation. But Melchior, thirsting for self-sacrifice, insisted on writing. He was much moved by his own magnanimity. Christopher refused to take the letter, and when Louisa came in and was acquainted with the turn of events, she declared that she would rather beg in the streets than expose her husband to such an insult. She added that she had every confidence in him, and that she was sure he would make amends out of love for the children and herself. In the end there was a scene of tender reconciliation, and Melchior’s letter was left on the table, and then fell under the cupboard, where it remained concealed.

But a few days later, when she was cleaning up, Louisa found it there, and as she was very unhappy about Melchior’s fresh outbreaks—he had forgotten all about it—instead of tearing it up, she kept it. She kept it for several months, always rejecting the idea of making use of it, in spite of the suffering she had to endure. But one day, when she saw Melchior once more beating Christopher and robbing him of his

money, she could bear it no longer, and when she was left alone with the boy, who was weeping, she went and fetched the letter, and gave it him, and said :

“ Go ! ”

Christopher hesitated, but he understood that there was no other way if they wished to save from the wreck the little that was left to them. He went to the Palace. He took nearly an hour to walk a distance that ordinarily took twenty minutes. He was overwhelmed by the shame of what he was doing. His pride, which had grown great in the years of sorrow and isolation, bled at the thought of publicly confessing his father's vice. He knew perfectly well that it was known to everybody, but by a strange and natural inconsequence he would not admit it, and pretended to notice nothing, and he would rather have been hewn in pieces than agree. And now, of his own accord, he was going ! . . . Twenty times he was on the point of turning back. He walked two or three times round the town, turning back just as he came near the Palace. He was not alone in his plight. His mother and brothers had also to be considered. Since his father had deserted them and betrayed them, it was his business as eldest son to take his place and come to their assistance. There was no room for hesitation or pride ; he had to swallow down his shame. He entered the Palace. On the staircase he almost turned and fled. He knelt down on a step ; he stayed for several minutes on the landing, with his hand on the door, until someone coming made him go in.

Everyone in the offices knew him. He asked to see His Excellency the Director of Theatres, Baron de

Hammer Langbach. A young clerk, sleek, bald, pink-faced, with a white waistcoat and a pink tie, shook his hand familiarly, and began to talk about the opera of the night before. Christopher repeated his question. The clerk replied that His Excellency was busy for the moment, but that if Christopher had a request to make they could present it with other documents which were to be sent in for His Excellency's signature. Christopher held out his letter. The clerk read it, and gave a cry of surprise.

"Oh, indeed!" he said brightly. "That is a good idea. He ought to have thought of that long ago! He never did anything better in his life! Ah, the old sot! How the devil did he bring himself to do it?"

He stopped short. Christopher had snatched the paper out of his hands, and, white with rage, shouted:

"I forbid you! . . . I forbid you to insult me!"

The clerk was staggered.

"But, my dear Christopher," he began to say, "whoever thought of insulting you? I only said what everybody thinks, and what you think yourself."

"No!" cried Christopher angrily.

"What! you don't think so? You don't think that he drinks?"

"It is not true!" said Christopher.

He stamped his foot.

The clerk shrugged his shoulders.

"In that case, why did he write this letter?"

"Because," said Christopher (he did not know what to say)—"because, when I come for my wages every month, I prefer to take my father's at the same time. It is no good our both putting ourselves out. . . . My father is very busy."

He reddened at the absurdity of his explanation. The clerk looked at him with pity and irony in his eyes. Christopher crumpled the paper in his hands, and turned to go. The clerk got up and took him by the arm.

"Wait a moment," he said. "I'll go and fix it up for you."

He went into the Director's office. Christopher waited, with the eyes of the other clerks upon him. His blood boiled. He did not know what he was doing, what to do, or what he ought to do. He thought of going away before the answer was brought to him, and he had just made up his mind to that when the door opened.

"His Excellency will see you," said the too obliging clerk.

Christopher had to go in.

His Excellency Baron de Hammer Langbach, a little neat old man with whiskers, moustaches, and a shaven chin, looked at Christopher over his golden spectacles without stopping writing, nor did he give any response to the boy's awkward bow.

"So," he said, after a moment, "you are asking, Herr Krafft . . . ?"

"Your Excellency," said Christopher hurriedly, "I ask your pardon. I have thought better of it. I have nothing to ask."

The old man sought no explanation for this sudden reconsideration. He looked more closely at Christopher, coughed, and said :

"Herr Krafft, will you give me the letter that is in your hand ?"

Christopher saw that the Director's gaze was fixed

on the paper which he was still unconsciously holding crumpled up in his hand.

"It is no use, Your Excellency," he murmured. "It is not worth while now."

"Please give it me," said the old man quietly, as though he had not heard.

Mechanically Christopher gave him the crumpled letter, but he plunged into a torrent of stuttered words while he held out his hand for the letter. His Excellency carefully smoothed out the paper, read it, looked at Christopher, let him flounder about with his explanations, then checked him, and said with a malicious light in his eyes :

"Very well, Herr Krafft ; the request is granted."

He dismissed him with a wave of his hand and went on with his writing.

Christopher went out, crushed.

"No offence, Christopher !" said the clerk kindly, when the boy came into the office again. Christopher let him shake his hand without daring to raise his eyes. He found himself outside the Palace. He was cold with shame. Everything that had been said to him recurred in his memory, and he imagined that there was an insulting irony in the pity of the people who honoured and were sorry for him. He went home, and answered only with a few irritable words Louisa's questions, as though he bore a grudge against her for what he had just done. He was racked by remorse when he thought of his father. He wanted to confess everything to him, and to beg his pardon. Melchior was not there. Christopher kept awake far into the night, waiting for him. The more he thought of him, the more his remorse quickened. He idealized him ;

he thought of him as weak, kind, unhappy, betrayed by his own family. As soon as he heard his step on the stairs he leaped from his bed to go and meet him, and throw himself in his arms ; but Melchior was in such a disgusting state of intoxication that Christopher had not even the courage to go near him, and he went to bed again, laughing bitterly at his own illusions.

When Melchior learned a few days later of what had happened, he was in a towering passion, and, in spite of all Christopher's entreaties, he went and made a scene at the Palace. But he returned with his tail between his legs, and breathed not a word of what had happened. He had been very badly received. He had been told that he would have to take a very different tone about the matter, that the pension had only been continued out of consideration for the worth of his son, and that if in the future there came any scandal concerning him to their ears, it would be suppressed. And so Christopher was much surprised and comforted to see his father accept his living from day to day, and even boast about having taken the initiative in the *sacrifice*.

But that did not keep Melchior from complaining outside that he had been robbed by his wife and children, that he had put himself out for them all his life, and that now they let him want for everything. He tried also to extract money from Christopher by all sorts of ingenious tricks and devices, which often used to make Christopher laugh, although he was hardly ever taken in by them. But as Christopher held firm, Melchior did not insist. He was curiously intimidated by the severity in the eyes of this boy of fourteen who judged him. He used to avenge himself by some

stealthy, dirty trick. He used to go to the cabaret and eat and drink as much as he pleased, and then pay nothing, pretending that his son would pay his debts. Christopher did not protest, for fear of increasing the scandal, and he and Louisa exhausted their resources in discharging Melchior's debts. In the end Melchior more and more lost interest in his work as violinist, since he no longer received his wages, and his absence from the theatre became so frequent that, in spite of Christopher's entreaties, they had to dismiss him. The boy was left to support his father, his brothers, and the whole household.

So at fourteen Christopher became the head of the family.

He stoutly faced his formidable task. His pride would not allow him to resort to the charity of others. He vowed that he would pull through alone. From his earliest days he had suffered too much from seeing his mother accept and even ask for humiliating charitable offerings. He used to argue the matter with her when she returned home triumphant with some present that she had obtained from one of her patronesses. She saw no harm in it, and was glad to be able, thanks to the money, to spare Christopher a little, and to bring another meagre dish forth for supper. But Christopher would become gloomy, and would not talk all evening, and would even refuse, without giving any reason, to touch food gained in this way. Louisa was vexed, and clumsily urged her son to eat. He was not to be budged, and in the end she would lose her temper, and say unkind things to him, and he would retort. Then he would fling his napkin on the

table and go out. His father would shrug his shoulders and call him a *poseur* ; his brothers would laugh at him and eat his portion.

But he had somehow to find a livelihood. His earnings from the orchestra were not enough. He gave lessons. His talents as an instrumentalist, his good reputation, and, above all, the Prince's patronage, brought him a numerous *clientèle* among the middle classes. Every morning from nine o'clock on he taught the piano to little girls, many of them older than himself, who frightened him horribly with their coquetry and maddened him with the clumsiness of their playing. They were absolutely stupid as far as music went, but, on the other hand, they had all, more or less, a keen sense of ridicule, and their mocking looks spared none of Christopher's awkwardnesses. It was torture for him. Sitting by their side on the edge of his chair, stiff, and red in the face ; bursting with anger, and not daring to stir ; controlling himself so as not to say stupid things, and afraid of the sound of his own voice, so that he could hardly speak a word ; trying to look severe, and feeling that his pupil was looking at him out of the corner of her eye, he would lose countenance, grow confused in the middle of a remark ; fearing to make himself ridiculous, he would become so, and break out into violent reproach. But it was very easy for his pupils to avenge themselves, and they did not fail to do so, and upset him by a certain way of looking at him, and by asking him the simplest questions, which made him blush up to the roots of his hair ; or they would ask him to do them some small service, such as fetching something they had forgotten from a piece of furniture, and that was for him a most

painful ordeal, for he had to cross the room under fire of malicious looks, which pitilessly remarked the least awkwardness in his movements and his clumsy legs, his stiff arms, his body cramped by his shyness.

From these lessons he had to hasten to rehearsal at the theatre. Often he had no time for lunch, and he used to carry a piece of bread and some cold meat in his pocket to eat during the interval. Sometimes he had to take the place of Tobias Pfeiffer, the *Musik Direktor*, who was interested in him, and sometimes had him to conduct the orchestra rehearsals instead of himself. And he had also to go on with his own musical education. Other piano lessons filled his day until the hour of the performance, and very often in the evening after the play he was sent for to play at the Palace. There he had to play for an hour or two. The Princess laid claim to a knowledge of music. She was very fond of it, but had never been able to perceive the difference between good and bad music. She used to make Christopher play through strange programmes, in which dull rhapsodies stood side by side with masterpieces. But her greatest pleasure was to make him improvise, and she used to provide him with heart-breakingly sentimental themes.

Christopher used to leave about midnight, worn out, with his hands burning, his head aching, his stomach empty. He was in a sweat, and outside snow would be falling, or there would be an icy fog. He had to walk across half the town to reach home. He went on foot, his teeth chattering, longing to sleep and to cry, and he had to take care not to splash his only evening dress-suit in the puddles.

He would go up to his room, which he still shared

with his brothers, and never was he so overwhelmed by disgust and despair with his life than at the moment when in his attic, with its stifling smell, he was at last permitted to take off the halter of his misery. He had hardly the heart to undress himself. Happily, no sooner did his head touch the pillow than he would sink into a heavy sleep, which deprived him of all consciousness of his troubles.

But he had to get up by dawn in summer, and before dawn in winter. He wished to do his own work. It was all the free time that he had between five o'clock and eight. Even then he had to waste some of it by work to command, for his title of *Hof Musicus* and his favour with the Grand Duke exacted from him official compositions for the Court festivals.

So the very source of his life was poisoned. Even his dreams were not free, but, as usual, this restraint made them only the stronger. When nothing hampers action, the soul has fewer reasons for action, and the closer the walls of Christopher's prison of care and banal tasks were drawn about him, the more his heart in its revolt felt its independence. In a life without obstacles he would doubtless have abandoned himself to chance and to the voluptuous sauntering of adolescence. As he could be free only for an hour or two a day, his strength flowed into that space of time like a river between walls of rock. It is a good discipline for art for a man to confine his efforts between unshakable bounds. In that sense it may be said that misery is a master, not only of thought, but of style; it teaches sobriety to the mind as to the body. When time is doled out and thoughts measured, a man says no word too much, and grows accustomed to thinking

only what is essential ; so he lives at double pressure, having less time for living.

This had happened in Christopher's case. Under his yoke he took full stock of the value of liberty, and he never frittered away the precious minutes with useless words or actions. His natural tendency to write with a diffuse abundancy, given up to all the caprice of a mind sincere but indiscriminating, found correction in being forced to think and do as much as possible in the least possible time. Nothing had so much influence on his artistic and moral development—not the lessons of his masters, nor the example of the masterpieces. During the years when the character is formed he came to consider music as an exact language, in which every sound has a meaning, and at the same time he came to loathe those musicians who talk without saying anything.

And yet the compositions which he wrote at this time were still far from expressing himself completely, because he was still very far from having completely discovered himself. He was seeking himself through the mass of acquired feelings which education imposes on a child as second nature. He had only intuitions of his true being, until he should feel the passions of adolescence, which strip the personality of its borrowed garments as a thunder-clap purges the sky of the mists that hang over it. Vague and great forebodings were mingled in him with strange memories, of which he could not rid himself. He raged against these lies ; he was wretched to see how inferior what he wrote was to what he thought ; he had bitter doubts of himself. But he could not resign himself to such a stupid defeat. He longed passionately to do better, to write great

things, and always he missed fire. After a moment of illusion as he wrote he saw that what he had done was worthless. He tore it up ; he burned everything that he did ; and, to crown his humiliation, he had to see his official works, the most mediocre of all, preserved, and he could not destroy them—the concerto, *The Royal Eagle*, for the Prince's birthday ; and the cantata, *The Marriage of Pallas*, written on the occasion of the marriage of Princess Adelaide—published at great expense in *éditions de luxe*, which perpetuated his imbecilities for posterity ; for he believed in posterity. He wept in his humiliation.

Fevered years ! No respite, no release—nothing to create a diversion from such maddening toil ; no games, no friends. How should he have them ? In the afternoon, when other children played, young Christopher, with his brows knit in attention, was at his place in the orchestra in the dusty and ill-lighted theatre ; and in the evening, when other children were abed, he was still there, sitting in his chair, bowed with weariness.

No intimacy with his brothers. The younger, Ernest, was twelve. He was a little ragamuffin, vicious and impudent, who spent his days with other rascallions like himself, and from their company had caught not only deplorable manners, but shameful habits which good Christopher, who had never so much as suspected their existence, was horrified to see one day. The other, Rodolphe, the favourite of Uncle Theodore, was to go into business. He was steady, quiet, but sly. He thought himself much superior to Christopher, and did not admit his authority in the house, although it seemed natural to him to eat the food that he provided. He had espoused the cause of Theodore and

Melchior's ill-feeling against Christopher, and used to repeat their absurd gossip. Neither of the brothers cared for music, and Rodolphe, in imitation of his uncle, affected to despise it. Chafing against Christopher's authority and lectures—for he took himself very seriously as the head of the family—the two boys had tried to rebel; but Christopher, who had lusty fists and the consciousness of right, sent them packing. But they did not for that cease to do with him as they liked. They abused his credulity, and laid traps for him, into which he invariably fell. They used to extort money from him with barefaced lies, and laughed at him behind his back. Christopher was always taken in. He had so much need of being loved that an affectionate word was enough to disarm his rancour. He would have forgiven them everything for a little love. But his confidence was cruelly shaken when he heard them laughing at his stupidity after a scene of hypocritical embracing which had moved him to tears, and they had taken advantage of it to rob him of a gold watch, a present from the Prince, which they coveted. He despised them, and yet went on letting himself be taken in from his unconquerable tendency to trust and to love. He knew it. He raged against himself, and he used to thrash his brothers soundly when he discovered once more that they had tricked him. That did not keep him from swallowing almost immediately the fresh hook which it pleased them to bait for him.

A more bitter cause of suffering was in store for him. He learned from officious neighbours that his father was speaking ill of him. After having been proud of his son's successes, and having boasted of them every-

where, Melchior was weak and shameful enough to be jealous of them. He tried to decry them. It was stupid to weep ; he could only shrug his shoulders in contempt. It was no use being angry about it, for his father did not know what he was doing, and was embittered by his own downfall. Christopher said nothing. He was afraid, if he said anything, of being too hard ; but he was cut to the heart.

They were melancholy gatherings at the family evening meal round the lamp, with a spotted cloth, with all the stupid chatter and the sound of the jaws of these people whom he despised and pitied, and yet loved in spite of everything. Only between himself and his brave mother did Christopher feel a bond of affection. But Louisa, like himself, exhausted herself during the day, and in the evening she was worn out and hardly spoke, and after dinner used to sleep in her chair over her darning. And she was so good that she seemed to make no difference in her love between her husband and her three sons. She loved them all equally. Christopher did not find in her the trusted friend that he so much needed.

So he was driven in upon himself. For days together he would not speak, fulfilling his tiresome and wearing task with a sort of silent rage. Such a mode of living was dangerous, especially for a child at a critical age, when he is most sensitive, and is exposed to every agent of destruction and the risk of being deformed for the rest of his life. Christopher's health suffered seriously. He had been endowed by his parents with a healthy constitution and a sound and healthy body ; but his very healthiness only served to feed his suffering when the weight of weariness and too early cares had

opened up a gap by which it might enter. Quite early in life there were signs of grave nervous disorders. When he was a small boy he was subject to fainting-fits and convulsions and vomiting whenever he encountered opposition. When he was seven or eight, about the time of the concert, his sleep had been troubled. He used to talk, cry, laugh, and weep in his sleep, and this habit used to return to him whenever he had too much to think of. Then he had cruel headaches, sometimes shooting pains at the base of his skull or the top of his head, sometimes a leaden heaviness. His eyes troubled him. Sometimes it was as though red-hot needles were piercing his eyeballs. He was subject to fits of dizziness, when he could not see to read, and had to stop for a minute or two. Insufficient and unsound food and irregular meals ruined the health of his stomach. He was racked by internal pains or exhausted by diarrhoea. But nothing brought him more suffering than his heart. It beat with a crazy irregularity. Sometimes it would leap in his bosom, and seem like to break ; sometimes it would hardly beat at all, and seem like to stop. At night his temperature would vary alarmingly ; it would change suddenly from fever-point to next to nothing. He would burn, then shiver with cold, pass through agony. His throat would go dry ; a lump in his throat would prevent his breathing. Naturally his imagination took fire. He dared not say anything to his family of what he was going through, but he was continually dissecting it with a minuteness which either enlarged his sufferings or created new ones. He decided that he had every known illness one after the other. He believed that he was going blind, and as he sometimes

used to turn giddy as he walked, he thought that he was going to fall down dead. Always that dreadful fear of being stopped on his road, of dying before his time, obsessed him, overwhelmed him, and pursued him. Ah, if he had to die, at least let it not be now, not before he had tasted victory ! . . .

Victory . . . the fixed idea which never ceases to burn within him without his being fully aware of it—the idea which bears him up through all his disgust, and fatigues, and the stagnant morass of such a life ! A dim and great foreknowledge of what he will be some day, of what he is already ! . . . What is he ? A sick, nervous child, who plays the violin in the orchestra and writes mediocre concertos ? No ; far more than such a child. That is no more than the wrapping, the seeming of a day ; that is not his Being. There is no connection between his Being and the existing shape of his face and thought. He knows that well. When he looks at himself in the mirror he does not know himself. That broad red face, those prominent eyebrows, those little sunken eyes, that short thick nose, that sullen mouth—the whole mask, ugly and vulgar, is foreign to himself. He does not know himself either in his writings. He judges, he knows that what he does and what he is are nothing ; and yet he is sure of what he will be and do. Sometimes he falls foul of such certainty as a vain lie. He takes pleasure in humiliating himself and bitterly mortifying himself by way of punishment. But his certainty endures ; nothing can alter it. Whatever he does, whatever he thinks, none of his thoughts, actions, or writings contain him or express him. He knows, he has this strange presentiment, that the more that

he is is not contained in the present, but is what he *will be*, what he *will be to-morrow*. *He will be!* . . . He is fired by that faith, he is intoxicated by that light! Ah, if only *To-day* does not block the way! If only he does not fall into one of the cunning traps which *To-day* is for ever laying for him!

So he steers his bark across the sea of days, turning his eyes neither to right nor left, motionless at the helm, with his gaze fixed on the bourne, the refuge, the end that he has in sight. In the orchestra, among the talkative musicians, at table with his own family, at the Palace, while he is playing without a thought of what he is playing, for the entertainment of Royal folk—it is in that future, that future which a speck may bring toppling to earth—no matter, it is in that that he lives.

He is at his old piano, in his garret, alone. Night falls. The dying light of day is cast upon his music. He strains his eyes to read the notes until the last ray of light is dead. The tenderness of hearts that are dead breathed forth from the dumb page fills him with love. His eyes are filled with tears. It seems to him that a beloved creature is standing behind him, that soft breathing caresses his cheek, that two arms are about his neck. He turns, trembling. He feels, he knows, that he is not alone. A soul that loves and is loved is there, near him. He groans aloud because he cannot perceive it, and yet that shadow of bitterness falling upon his ecstasy has sweetness, too. Even sadness has its light. He thinks of his beloved masters, of the genius that is gone, though its soul lives on in the music which it had lived in its life. His heart is

overflowing with love ; he dreams of the superhuman happiness which must have been the lot of these glorious men, since the reflection only of their happiness is still so much aflame. He dreams of being like them, of giving out such love as this, with lost rays to lighten his misery with a godlike smile. In his turn to be a god, to give out the warmth of joy, to be a sun of life ! . . .

Alas ! if one day he does become the equal of those whom he loves, if he does achieve that brilliant happiness for which he longs, he will see the illusion that was upon him. . . .

II

OTTO

ONE Sunday when Christopher had been invited by his *Musik Direktor* to dine at the little country house which Tobias Pfeiffer owned an hour's journey from the town, he took the Rhine steamboat. On deck he sat next to a boy about his own age, who eagerly made room for him. Christopher paid no attention, but after a moment, feeling that his neighbour had never taken his eyes off him, he turned and looked at him. He was a fair boy, with round pink cheeks, with his hair parted on one side, and a shade of down on his lip. He looked frankly what he was—a hobbledehoy—though he made great efforts to seem grown up. He was dressed with ostentatious care—flannel suit, light gloves, white shoes, and a pale blue tie—and he carried a little stick in his hand. He looked at Christopher out of the corner of his eye without turning his head, with his neck stiff, like a hen; and when Christopher looked at him he blushed up to his ears, took a newspaper from his pocket, and pretended to be absorbed in it, and to look important over it. But a few minutes later he dashed to pick up Christopher's hat, which had fallen. Christopher, surprised at such politeness, looked once more at the boy, and once more he blushed. Christopher thanked him curtly, for he did not like

such obsequious eagerness, and he hated to be fussed with. All the same, he was flattered by it.

Soon it passed from his thoughts ; his attention was occupied by the view. It was long since he had been able to escape from the town, and so he had keen pleasure in the wind that beat against his face, in the sound of the water against the boat, in the great stretch of water and the changing spectacle presented by the banks—bluffs grey and dull, willow-trees half under water, towns crowned with Gothic towers and factory chimneys belching black smoke, pale vines, and legendary rocks. And as he was in ecstasy over it all, his neighbour in a choking voice timidly imparted a few historic facts concerning the ruins that they saw, cleverly restored and covered with ivy. He seemed to be lecturing to himself. Christopher, roused to interest, plied him with questions. The other replied eagerly, glad to display his knowledge, and with every sentence he addressed himself directly to Christopher, calling him "*Herr Hof Violinist*."

"You know me, then ?" said Christopher.

"Oh yes," said the boy, with a simple admiration that tickled Christopher's vanity.

They talked. The boy had often seen Christopher at concerts, and his imagination had been touched by everything that he had heard about him. He did not say so to Christopher, but Christopher felt it, and was pleasantly surprised by it. He was not used to being spoken to in this tone of eager respect. He went on questioning his neighbour about the history of the country through which they were passing. The other set out all the knowledge that he had, and Christopher admired his learning. But that was only the peg on

which their conversation hung. What interested them was the making of each other's acquaintance. They dared not frankly approach the subject ; they returned to it again and again with awkward questions. Finally they plunged, and Christopher learned that his new friend was called Otto Diener, and was the son of a rich merchant in the town. It appeared, naturally, that they had friends in common, and little by little their tongues were loosed. They were talking eagerly when the boat arrived at the town at which Christopher was to get out. Otto got out, too. That surprised them, and Christopher proposed that they should take a walk together until dinner-time. They struck out across the fields. Christopher had taken Otto's arm familiarly, and was telling him his plans as if he had known him from his birth. He had been so much deprived of the society of children of his own age that he found an inexpressible joy in being with this boy, so learned and well brought up, who was in sympathy with him.

Time passed, and Christopher took no count of it. Diener, proud of the confidence which the young musician showed him, dared not point out that the dinner-hour had rung. At last he thought that he must remind him of it, but Christopher, who had begun the ascent of a hill in the woods, declared that they must go to the top, and when they reached it he lay down on the grass as though he meant to spend the day there. After a quarter of an hour Diener, seeing that he seemed to have no intention of moving, hazarded again :

“ And your dinner ? ”

Christopher, lying at full length, with his hands behind his head, said quietly :

“ Tssh ! ”

Then he looked at Otto, saw his scared look, and began to laugh.

"It is too good here," he explained. "I shan't go. Let them wait for me!"

He half rose.

"Are you in a hurry? No? Do you know what we'll do? We'll dine together. I know of an inn."

Diener would have had many objections to make—not that anyone was waiting for him, but because it was hard for him to come to any sudden decision, whatever it might be. He was methodical, and needed to be prepared beforehand. But Christopher's question was put in such a tone as allowed of no refusal. He let himself be dragged off, and they began to talk again.

At the inn their eagerness died down. Both were occupied with the question as to who should give the dinner, and each within himself made it a point of honour to give it—Diener because he was the richer, Christopher because he was the poorer. They made no direct reference to the matter, but Diener made great efforts to assert his right by the tone of authority which he tried to take as he asked for the menu. Christopher understood what he was at, and he turned the tables on him by ordering other dishes of a rare kind. He wanted to show that he was as much at his ease as anybody, and when Diener tried again by endeavouring to take upon himself the choice of wine, Christopher crushed him with a look, and ordered a bottle of one of the most expensive vintages they had in the inn.

When they found themselves seated before a considerable repast they were abashed by it. They could

find nothing to say, and they ate mincingly, and were awkward and constrained in their movements. They became conscious suddenly that they were strangers to each other, and they watched each other. They made vain efforts to revive the conversation ; it dropped immediately. Their first half-hour was a time of fearful boredom. Fortunately, the meat and drink soon had an effect on them, and they looked at each other more confidently. Christopher especially, who was not used to such good things, became extraordinarily loquacious. He told of the difficulties of his life, and Otto, breaking through his reserve, confessed that he also was not happy. He was weak and timid, and his schoolfellows put upon him. They laughed at him, and could not forgive him for despising their vulgar manners. They played all sorts of tricks on him. Christopher clenched his fists, and said they had better not try it in his presence. Otto also was misunderstood by his family. Christopher knew the unhappiness of that, and they commiserated each other on their common misfortunes. Diener's parents wanted him to become a merchant, and to step into his father's place, but he wanted to be a poet. He would be a poet, even though he had to fly the town, like Schiller, and brave poverty ! (His father's fortune would all come to him, and it was considerable.) He confessed blushingly that he had already written verses on the sadness of life, but he could not bring himself to recite them, in spite of Christopher's entreaties. But in the end he did give two or three of them, dithering with emotion. Christopher thought them admirable. They exchanged plans. Later on they would work together ; they would write dramas and song-cycles. They ad-

mired each other. Besides his reputation as a musician, Christopher's strength and bold ways made an impression on Otto, and Christopher was sensible of Otto's elegance and distinguished manners—everything in this world is relative—and of his ease of manner—that ease of manner which he looked and longed for.

Made drowsy by their meal, with their elbows on the table, they talked and listened to each other with softness in their eyes. The afternoon drew on ; they had to go. Otto made a last attempt to procure the bill, but Christopher nailed him to his seat with an angry look which made it impossible for him to insist. Christopher was only uneasy on one point—that he might be asked for more than he had. He would have given his watch and everything that he had about him rather than admit it to Otto. But he was not called on to go so far. He had to spend on the dinner almost the whole of his month's money.

They went down the hill again. The shades of evening were beginning to fall over the pine-woods. Their tops were still bathed in rosy light ; they swung slowly with a surging sound. The carpet of purple pine-needles deadened the sound of their footsteps. They said no word. Christopher felt a strange sweet sadness welling through his heart. He was happy ; he wished to talk, but was weighed down with his sweet sorrow. He stopped for a moment, and so did Otto. All was silence. Flies buzzed high above them in a ray of sunlight ; a rotten branch fell. Christopher took Otto's hand, and in a trembling voice said :

“ Will you be my friend ? ”

Otto murmured :

“ Yes.”

They shook hands ; their hearts beat ; they dared hardly look at each other.

After a moment they walked on. They were a few paces away from each other, and they dared say no more until they were out of the woods. They were fearful of each other, and of their strange emotion. They walked very fast, and never stopped until they had issued from the shadow of the trees ; then they took courage again, and joined hands. They marvelled at the limpid evening falling, and they talked disconnectedly.

On the boat, sitting at the bows in the brilliant twilight, they tried to talk of trivial matters, but they gave no heed to what they were saying. They were lost in their own happiness and weariness. They felt no need to talk, or to hold hands, or even to look at each other ; they were near each other.

When they were near their journey's end they agreed to meet again on the following Sunday. Christopher took Otto to his door. Under the light of the gas they timidly smiled and murmured *au revoir*. They were glad to part, so wearied were they by the tension at which they had been living for those hours, and by the pain it cost them to break the silence with a single word.

Christopher returned alone in the night. His heart was singing : " I have a friend ! I have a friend ! " He saw nothing, he heard nothing, he thought of nothing else.

He was very sleepy, and fell asleep as soon as he reached his room ; but he was awakened twice or thrice during the night, as by some fixed idea. He repeated, " I have a friend," and went to sleep again at once.

Next morning it seemed to be all a dream. To test the reality of it, he tried to recall the smallest details of the day. He was absorbed by this occupation while he was giving his lessons, and even during the afternoon he was so absent during the orchestra rehearsal that when he left he could hardly remember what he had been playing.

When he returned home he found a letter waiting for him. He had no need to ask himself whence it came. He ran and shut himself up in his room to read it. It was written on pale blue paper in a laboured, long, uncertain hand, with very correct flourishes :

“DEAR HERR CHRISTOPHER—dare I say HONOURED FRIEND ?—

“I am thinking much of our doings yesterday, and I do thank you tremendously for your kindness to me. I am so grateful for all that you have done, and for your kind words, and the delightful walk and the excellent dinner ! I am only worried that you should have spent so much money on it. What a lovely day ! Do you not think there was something providential in that strange meeting ? It seems to me that it was Fate decreed that we should meet. How glad I shall be to see you again on Sunday ! I hope you will not have had too much unpleasantness for having missed the *Hof Musik Direktor's* dinner. I should be so sorry if you had any trouble because of me.

“Dear Herr Christopher, I am always

“Your very devoted servant and friend,

“OTTO DIENER.

“P.S.—On Sunday please do not call for me at home. It would be better, if you will, for us to meet at the *Schloss Garten*.”

Christopher read the letter with tears in his eyes. He kissed it ; he laughed aloud ; he jumped about on his bed. Then he ran to the table and took pen in hand to reply at once. He could not wait a moment. But he was not used to writing. He could not express what was swelling in his heart ; he dug into the paper with his pen, and blackened his fingers with ink ; he stamped impatiently. At last, by dint of putting out his tongue and making five or six drafts, he succeeded in writing in malformed letters, which flew out in all directions, and with terrific mistakes in spelling :

“ MY SOUL,

“ How dare you speak of gratitude, because I love you ? Have I not told you how sad I was and lonely before I knew you ? Your friendship is the greatest of blessings. Yesterday I was happy, happy !—for the first time in my life. I weep for joy as I read your letter. Yes, my beloved, there is no doubt that it was Fate brought us together. Fate wishes that we should be friends to do great things. Friends ! The lovely word ! Can it be that at last I have a friend ? Oh ! you will never leave me ? You will be faithful to me ? Always ! always ! . . . How beautiful it will be to grow up together, to work together, to bring together—I my musical whimsies, and all the crazy things that go chasing through my mind ; you your intelligence and amazing learning ! How much you know ! I have never met a man so clever as you. There are moments when I am uneasy. I seem to be unworthy of your friendship. You are so noble and so accomplished, and I am so grateful to you for loving so coarse a creature as myself ! . . . But no !

I have just said, let there be no talk of gratitude. In friendship there is no obligation nor benefaction. I would not accept any benefaction! We are equal, since we love. How impatient I am to see you! I will not call for you at home, since you do not wish it—although, to tell the truth, I do not understand all these precautions—but you are the wiser; you are surely right. . . .

“One word only! No more talk of money. I hate money—the word and the thing itself. If I am not rich, I am yet rich enough to give to my friend, and it is my joy to give all I can for him. Would not you do the same? And if I needed it, would you not be the first to give me all your fortune? But that shall never be! I have sound fists and a sound head, and I shall always be able to earn the bread that I eat. Till Sunday! Dear God, a whole week without seeing you! And for two days I have not seen you! How have I been able to live so long without you?

“The conductor tried to grumble, but do not bother about it any more than I do. What are others to me? I care nothing what they think or what they may ever think of me. Only you matter. Love me well, my soul; love me as I love you! I cannot tell you how much I love you. I am yours, yours, yours, from the tips of my fingers to the apple of my eye.

“Yours always,

“CHRISTOPHER.”

Christopher was devoured with impatience for the rest of the week. He would go out of his way, and make long turns to pass by Otto's house. Not that he counted on seeing him, but the sight of the house was

enough to make him grow pale and red with emotion. On the Thursday he could bear it no longer, and sent a second letter even more high-flown than the first. Otto answered it sentimentally.

Sunday came at length, and Otto was punctually at the meeting-place. But Christopher had been there for an hour, waiting impatiently for the walk. He began to imagine dreadfully that Otto would not come. He trembled lest Otto should be ill, for he did not suppose for a moment that Otto might break his word. He whispered over and over again, "Dear God, let him come—let him come!" and he struck at the pebbles in the avenue with his stick, and he said to himself that if he missed three times Otto would not come, but if he hit them Otto would appear at once. And in spite of his care and the easiness of the test, he had just missed three times when he saw Otto coming at his easy, deliberate pace; for Otto was above all things correct, even when he was most moved. Christopher ran to him, and with his throat dry wished him "Good-day!" Otto replied, "Good-day!" and they found that they had nothing more to say to each other, except that the weather was fine, and that it was five or six minutes past ten, or it might be ten past, because the castle clock was always slow.

They went to the station, and went by rail to a neighbouring place which was a favourite excursion from the town. On the way they exchanged not more than ten words. They tried to make up for it by eloquent looks, but they were no more successful. In vain did they try to tell each other what friends they were; their eyes would say nothing at all. They were just play-acting. Christopher saw that, and was

humiliated. He did not understand how he could not express or even feel all that had filled his heart an hour before. Otto did not, perhaps, so exactly take stock of their failure, because he was less sincere, and examined himself with more circumspection, but he was just as disappointed. The truth is that the boys had, during their week of separation, blown out their feelings to such a diapason that it was impossible for them to keep them actually at that pitch, and when they met again their first impression must of necessity be false. They had to break away from it, but they could not bring themselves to agree to it.

All day they wandered in the country without ever breaking through the awkwardness and constraint that were upon them. It was a holiday. The inns and woods were filled with a rabble of excursionists—little *bourgeois* families who made a great noise and ate everywhere. That added to their ill-humour. They attributed to the poor people the impossibility of again finding the carelessness of their first walk. But they talked, they took great pains to find subjects of conversation; they were afraid of finding that they had nothing to say to each other. Otto displayed his school-learning; Christopher entered into technical explanations of musical compositions and violin-playing. They oppressed each other; they crushed each other by talking; and they never stopped talking, trembling lest they should, for then there opened before them abysses of silence which horrified them. Otto came near to weeping, and Christopher was near leaving him and running away as hard as he could, he was so bored and ashamed.

Only an hour before they had to take the train again

did they thaw. In the depths of the woods a dog was barking ; he was hunting on his own account. Christopher proposed that they should hide by his path to try and see his quarry. They ran into the midst of the thicket. The dog came near them, and then went away again. They went to right and left, went forward and doubled. The barking grew louder : the dog was choking with impatience in his lust for slaughter. He came near them. Christopher and Otto, lying on the dead leaves in the rut of a path, waited and held their breath. The barking stopped ; the dog had lost the scent. They heard his yap once again in the distance ; then silence came upon the woods. Not a sound, only the mysterious hum of millions of creatures, insects, and creeping things, moving unceasingly, destroying the forest — the measured breathing of death, which never stops. The boys listened, and they did not stir. Just when they got up, disappointed, and said, " It is all over ; he will not come ! " a little hare plunged out of the thicket. He came straight upon them. They saw him at the same moment, and gave a cry of joy. The hare turned in his tracks and jumped aside. They saw him dash into the brushwood head over heels. The stirring of the rumpled leaves vanished away like a ripple on the face of waters. Although they were sorry for having cried out, the adventure filled them with joy. They rocked with laughter as they thought of the hare's terrified leap, and Christopher imitated it grotesquely. Otto did the same. Then they chased each other. Otto was the hare, Christopher the dog. They plunged through woods and meadows, dashing through hedges and leaping ditches. A peasant

shouted at them, because they had rushed over a field of rye. They did not stop to hear him. Christopher imitated the hoarse barking of the dog to such perfection that Otto laughed until he cried. At last they rolled down a slope, shouting like mad things. When they could not utter another sound they sat up and looked at each other, with tears of laughter in their eyes. They were quite happy, and pleased with themselves. They were no longer trying to play the heroic friend ; they were frankly what they were—two boys.

They came back arm-in-arm, singing senseless songs, and yet, when they were on the point of returning to the town, they thought they had better resume their pose, and under the last tree of the woods they carved their initials intertwined. But then good temper had the better of their sentimentality, and in the train they shouted with laughter whenever they looked at each other. They parted assuring each other that they had had a “hugely delightful” (*kolossal entzückend*) day, and that conviction gained with them when they were alone once more.

They resumed their work of construction more patient and ingenious even than that of the bees, for of a few mediocre scraps of memory they fashioned a marvellous image of themselves and their friendship. After having idealized each other during the week, they met again on the Sunday, and in spite of the discrepancy between the truth and their illusion, they got used to not noticing it and to twisting things to fit in with their desires.

They were proud of being friends. The very contrast of their natures brought them together. Chris-

topher knew nothing so beautiful as Otto. His fine hands, his lovely hair, his fresh complexion, his shy speech, the politeness of his manners, and his scrupulous care of his appearance delighted him. Otto was subjugated by Christopher's brimming strength and independence. Accustomed by age-old inheritance to religious respect for all authority, he took a fearful joy in the company of a comrade in whose nature was so little reverence for the established order of things. He had a little voluptuous thrill of terror whenever he heard him decry every reputation in the town, and even mimic the Grand Duke himself. Christopher knew the fascination that he so exercised over his friend, and he used to exaggerate his aggressive temper. Like some old revolutionary, he used to hew away at social conventions and the laws of the State. Otto would listen, scandalized and delighted. He used timidly to try and join in, but he was always careful to look round to see if anyone could hear.

Christopher never failed, when they walked together, to leap the fences of a field whenever he saw a board forbidding it, or he would pick fruit over the walls of private grounds. Otto was in terror lest they should be discovered. But such feelings had for him an exquisite savour, and in the evening, when he had returned, he would think himself a hero. He admired Christopher fearfully. His instinct of obedience found a satisfying quality in a friendship in which he had only to acquiesce in the will of his friend. Christopher never put him to the trouble of coming to a decision. He decided everything, decreed the doings of the day, decreed even the ordering of life, making plans, which admitted of no discussion, for Otto's future, just as he

did for his family. Otto fell in with them, though he was a little put aback by hearing Christopher dispose of his fortune for the building later on of a theatre of his own contriving. But, intimidated by his friend's imperious tones, he did not protest, being convinced also by his friend's conviction that the money amassed by *Commerzienrath* Oscar Diener could be put to no nobler use. Christopher never for a moment had any idea that he might be violating Otto's will. He was instinctively a despot, and never imagined that his friend's wishes might be different from his own. Had Otto expressed a desire different from his own, he would not have hesitated to sacrifice his own personal preference. He would have sacrificed even more for him. He was consumed by the desire to run some risk for him. He wished passionately that there might appear some opportunity of putting his friendship to the test. When they were out walking he used to hope that they might meet some danger, so that he might fling himself forward to face it. He would have loved to die for Otto. Meanwhile, he watched over him with a restless solicitude, gave him his hand in awkward places, as though he were a girl. He was afraid that he might be tired, afraid that he might be hot, afraid that he might be cold. When they sat down under a tree he took off his coat to put it about his shoulders; when they walked he carried his cloak. He would have carried Otto himself. He used to devour him with his eyes like a lover, and, to tell the truth, he was in love.

He did not know it, not knowing yet what love was. But sometimes, when they were together, he was overtaken by a strange unease—the same that had choked

him on that first day of their friendship in the pine-woods—and the blood would rush to his face and set his cheeks aflame. He was afraid. By an instinctive unanimity the two boys used furtively to separate, and run away from each other, and one would lag behind on the road. They would pretend to be busy looking for blackberries in the hedges, and they did not know what it was that so perturbed them.

But it was in their letters especially that their feelings flew high. They were not then in any danger of being contradicted by facts, and nothing could check their illusions or intimidate them. They wrote to each other two or three times a week in a passionately lyric style. They hardly ever spoke of real happenings or common things; they raised great problems in an apocalyptic manner, which passed imperceptibly from enthusiasm to despair. They called each other, "My blessing, my hope, my beloved, my Self." They made a fearful hash of the word "Soul." They painted in tragic colours the sadness of their lot, and were desolate at having brought into the existence of their friend the sorrows of their existence.

"I am sorry, my love," wrote Christopher, "for the pain which I bring you. I cannot bear that you should suffer. It must not be. *I will not have it.*" (He underlined the words with a stroke of the pen that dug into the paper.) "If you suffer, where shall I find strength to live? I have no happiness but in you. Oh, be happy! I will gladly take all the burden of sorrow upon myself! Think of me! Love me! I have such great need of being loved. From your love there comes to me a warmth which gives me life. If you knew how I shiver! There is winter

and a biting wind in my heart. I embrace your soul."

"My thought kisses yours," replied Otto.

"I take your face in my hands," was Christopher's answer, "and what I have not done and will not do with my lips I do with all my being. I kiss you as I love you, Prudence!"

Otto pretended to doubt him.

"Do you love me as much as I love you?"

"O God," wrote Christopher, "not as much, but ten, a hundred, a thousand times more! What! Do you not feel it? What would you have me do to stir your heart?"

"What a lovely friendship is ours!" sighed Otto. "Was there ever its like in history? It is sweet and fresh as a dream. If only it does not pass away! If you were to cease to love me!"

"How stupid you are, my beloved!" replied Christopher. "Forgive me, but your weakling fear enrages me. How can you ask whether I shall cease to love you! For me to live is to love you. Death is powerless against my love. You yourself could do nothing if you wished to destroy it. Even if you betrayed me, even if you rent my heart, I should die with a blessing upon you for the love with which you fill me. Once for all, then, do not be uneasy, and vex me no more with these cowardly doubts!"

But a week later it was he who wrote:

"It is three days now since I heard a word fall from your lips. I tremble. Would you forget me? My blood freezes at the thought. . . . Yes, doubtless. . . . The other day only I saw your coldness towards me. You love me no longer! You are thinking of

leaving me ! . . . Listen ! If you forget me, if you ever betray me, I will kill you like a dog !”

“ You do me wrong, my dear heart,” groaned Otto. “ You draw tears from me. I do not deserve this. But you can do as you will. You have such rights over me that, if you were to break my soul, there would always be a spark left to live and love you always !”

“ Heavenly powers !” cried Christopher. “ I have made my friend weep ! . . . Heap insults on me, beat me, trample me under foot ! I am a wretch ! I do not deserve your love !”

They had special ways of writing the address on their letters, of placing the stamp—upside down, askew, at bottom in a corner of the envelope—to distinguish their letters from those which they wrote to persons who did not matter. These childish secrets had the charm of the sweet mysteries of love.

One day, as he was returning from a lesson, Christopher saw Otto in the street with a boy of his own age. They were laughing and talking familiarly. Christopher went pale, and followed them with his eyes until they had disappeared round the corner of the street. They had not seen him. He went home. It was as though a cloud had passed over the sun ; all was dark.

When they met on the following Sunday, Christopher said nothing at first ; but after they had been walking for half an hour he said in a choking voice :

“ I saw you on Wednesday in the *Königgasse*.”

“ Ah !” said Otto.

And he blushed.

Christopher went on :

“ You were not alone.”

“ No,” said Otto ; “ I was with someone.

Christopher swallowed down his spittle, and asked in a voice which he strove to make careless :

“ Who was it ?”

“ My cousin Franz.”

“ Ah !” said Christopher ; and after a moment :

“ You have never said anything about him to me.”

“ He lives at Rheinbach.”

“ Do you see him often ?”

“ He comes here sometimes.”

“ And you, do you go and stay with him ?”

“ Sometimes.”

“ Ah !” said Christopher again.

Otto, who was not sorry to turn the conversation, pointed out a bird who was pecking at a tree. They talked of other things. Ten minutes later Christopher broke out again :

“ Are you friends with him ?”

“ With whom ?” asked Otto.

(He knew perfectly who was meant.)

“ With your cousin.”

“ Yes. Why ?”

“ Oh, nothing !”

Otto did not like his cousin much, for he used to bother him with bad jokes ; but a strange malign instinct made him add a few moments later :

“ He is very nice.”

“ Who ?” asked Christopher.

(He knew quite well who was meant.)

“ Franz.”

Otto waited for Christopher to say something, but

he seemed not to have heard. He was cutting a switch from a hazel-tree. Otto went on :

“He is amusing. He has all sorts of stories.”

Christopher whistled carelessly.

Otto renewed the attack :

“And he is so clever . . . and distinguished ! . . .”

Christopher shrugged his shoulders as though to say :

“What interest can this person have for me ?”

And as Otto, piqued, began to go on, he brutally cut him short, and pointed out a spot to which to run.

They did not touch on the subject again the whole afternoon, but they were frigid, affecting an exaggerated politeness which was unusual for them, especially for Christopher. The words stuck in his throat. At last he could contain himself no longer, and in the middle of the road he turned to Otto, who was lagging five yards behind. He took him fiercely by the hands, and let loose upon him :

“Listen, Otto ! I will not—I will not let you be so friendly with Franz, because . . . because you are my friend, and I will not let you love anyone more than me ! I will not ! You see, you are everything to me ! You cannot . . . you must not ! . . . If I lost you, there would be nothing left but death. I do not know what I should do. I should kill myself ; I should kill you ! No, forgive me ! . . .”

Tears fell from his eyes

Otto, moved and frightened by the sincerity of such grief, growling out threats, made haste to swear that he did not and never would love anybody so much as Christopher, that Franz was nothing to him, and that

he would not see him again if Christopher wished it. Christopher drank in his words, and his heart took new life. He laughed and breathed heavily ; he thanked Otto effusively. He was ashamed of having made such a scene, but he was relieved of a great weight. They stood face to face, and looked at each other, not moving, and holding hands. They were very happy, and very much embarrassed. They became silent ; then they began to talk again, and found their old gaiety. They felt more at one than ever.

But it was not the last scene of the kind. Now that Otto felt his power over Christopher, he was tempted to abuse it. He knew his sore spot, and was irresistibly tempted to place his finger on it. Not that he had any pleasure in Christopher's anger ; on the contrary, it made him unhappy—but he felt his power by making Christopher suffer. He was not bad ; he had the soul of a girl.

In spite of his promises, he continued to appear arm in arm with Franz or some other comrade. They made a great noise between them, and he used to laugh in an affected way. When Christopher reproached him with it, he used to titter and pretend not to take him seriously, until, seeing Christopher's eyes change and his lips tremble with anger, he would change his tone, and fearfully promise not to do it again, and the next day he would do it. Christopher would write him furious letters, in which he called him :

“Scoundrel ! Let me never hear of you again ! I do not know you ! May the devil take you, and all dogs of your kidney !”

But a tearful word from Otto, or, as he ever did, the sending of a flower as a token of his eternal constancy,

was enough for Christopher to be plunged in remorse, and to write :

“My angel, I am mad ! Forget my idiocy. You are the best of men. Your little finger alone is worth more than all stupid Christopher. You have the treasures of an ingenuous and delicate tenderness. I kiss your flower with tears in my eyes. It is there on my heart. I thrust it into my skin with blows of my fist. I would that it could make me bleed, so that I might the more feel your exquisite goodness and my own infamous folly ! . . .”

But they began to weary of each other. It is false to pretend that little quarrels feed friendship. Christopher was sore against Otto for the injustice that Otto made him be guilty of. He tried to argue with himself ; he laid the blame upon his own despotic temper. His loyal and eager nature, brought for the first time to the test of love, gave itself utterly, and demanded a gift as utter without the reservation of one particle of the heart. He admitted no sharing in friendship. Being ready to sacrifice all for his friend, he thought it right and even necessary that his friend should wholly sacrifice himself and everything for him. But he was beginning to feel that the world was not built on the model of his own inflexible character, and that he was asking things which others could not give. Then he tried to submit. He blamed himself, he regarded himself as an egoist, who had no right to encroach upon the liberty of his friend, and to monopolize his affection. He did sincerely endeavour to leave him free, whatever it might cost himself. In a spirit of humiliation he did set himself to pledge Otto not to neglect Franz ; he tried to persuade himself that he

was glad to see him finding pleasure in society other than his own. But when Otto, who was not deceived, maliciously obeyed him, he could not help lowering at him, and then he broke out again.

If necessary, he would have forgiven Otto for preferring other friends to himself ; but what he could not stomach was the lie. Otto was neither liar nor hypocrite ; it was as difficult for him to tell the truth as for a stutterer to pronounce words. What he said was never altogether true nor altogether false. Either from timidity or from uncertainty of his own feelings he rarely spoke definitely. His answers were equivocal, and, above all, upon every occasion he made mystery and was secret in a way that set Christopher beside himself. When he was caught tripping, or was caught in what, according to the conventions of their friendship, was a fault, instead of admitting it he would go on denying it and telling absurd stories. One day Christopher, exasperated, struck him. He thought it must be the end of their friendship, and that Otto would never forgive him ; but after sulking for a few hours Otto came back as though nothing had happened. He had no resentment for Christopher's violence—perhaps even it was not unpleasing to him, and had a certain charm for him—and yet he resented Christopher letting himself be tricked, gulping down all his mendacities. He despised him a little, and thought himself superior. Christopher, for his part, resented Otto receiving blows without revolting.

They no longer saw each other with the eyes of those first days. Their failings showed up in full light. Otto found Christopher's independence less charming.

Christopher was a tiresome companion when they went walking. He had no sort of concern for correctness. He used to dress as he liked, take off his coat, open his waistcoat, walk with open collar, roll up his shirt-sleeves, put his hat on the end of his stick, and fling out his chest in the air. He used to swing his arms as he walked, whistle, and sing at the top of his voice. He used to be red in the face, sweaty, and dusty. He looked like a peasant returning from a fair. The aristocratic Otto used to be mortified at being seen in his company. When he saw a carriage coming he used to contrive to lag some ten paces behind, and to look as though he were walking alone.

Christopher was no less embarrassing company when he began to talk at an inn or in a railway-carriage when they were returning home. He used to talk loudly, and say anything that came into his head, and treat Otto with a disgusting familiarity. He used to express opinions quite recklessly concerning people known to everybody, or even about the appearance of people sitting only a few yards away from him, or he would enter into intimate details concerning his health and domestic affairs. It was useless for Otto to roll his eyes and to make signals of alarm. Christopher seemed not to notice them, and no more controlled himself than if he had been alone. Otto would see smiles on the faces of his neighbours, and would gladly have sunk into the ground. He thought Christopher coarse, and could not understand how he could ever have found delight in him.

What was most serious was that Christopher was just as reckless and indifferent concerning all the

hedges, fences, enclosures, walls, prohibitions of entry, threats of fines, *Verbot* of all sorts, and everything that sought to confine his liberty, and protect the sacred rights of property against it. Otto lived in fear from moment to moment, and all his remarks were useless. Christopher grew worse out of bravado.

One day, when Christopher, with Otto at his heels, was walking perfectly at home across a private wood, in spite of, or because of, the walls fortified with broken bottles, which they had had to clear, they found themselves suddenly face to face with a gamekeeper, who let fire a volley of oaths at them, and after keeping them for some time under a threat of legal proceedings, packed them off in the most ignominious fashion. Otto did not shine under this ordeal. He thought that he was already in gaol, and wept, stupidly protesting that he had gone in by accident, and that he had followed Christopher without knowing whither he was going. When he saw that he was safe, instead of being glad, he bitterly reproached Christopher. He complained that Christopher had brought him into trouble. Christopher quelled him with a look, and called him "Lily-liver!" There was a quick passage of words. Otto would have left Christopher if he had known how to find the way alone. He was forced to follow him, but they affected to pretend that they were not together.

A storm was brewing. In their anger they had not seen it coming. The baking countryside resounded with the cries of insects. Suddenly all was still. They only grew aware of the silence after a few minutes. Their ears buzzed. They raised their eyes; the sky was black; huge, heavy, livid clouds overcast it. They

came up from every side like a cavalry-charge. They seemed all to be hastening towards an invisible point, drawn by a gap in the sky. Otto, in terror, dared not tell his fears to Christopher, and Christopher took a malignant pleasure in pretending not to notice anything. But without saying a word they drew nearer together. They were alone upon the wide country. Silence. Not a wind stirred. Hardly a fevered tremor that made the little leaves of the trees shiver now and then. Suddenly a whirling wind raised the dust, twisted the trees, and lashed them furiously. And the silence came again, more terrible than before. Otto, in a trembling voice, spoke at last.

‘It is a storm. We must go home.’

Christopher said :

“Let us go home.”

But it was too late. A blinding, savage light flashed, the heavens roared, the vault of clouds rumbled. In a moment they were wrapped about by the hurricane, maddened by the lightning, deafened by the thunder, drenched from head to foot. They were in deserted country, half an hour from the nearest house. In the lashing rain, in the dim light, came the great red flashes of the storm. They tried to run, but, their wet clothes clinging, they could not walk. Their shoes slipped on their feet, the water trickled down their bodies. It was difficult to breathe. Otto’s teeth were chattering, and he was mad with rage. He said biting things to Christopher. He wanted to stop ; he declared that it was dangerous to walk ; he threatened to sit down on the road, to sleep on the soil in the middle of the ploughed fields. Christopher made no reply. He went on walking, blinded by the wind, the rain, and

the lightning ; deafened by the noise ; a little uneasy, but unwilling to admit it.

And suddenly it was all over. The storm had passed, as it had come. But they were both in a pitiful condition. In truth, Christopher was, as usual, so dishevelled that a little more disorder made hardly any difference to him. But Otto, so neat, so careful of his appearance, cut a sorry figure. It was as though he had just taken a bath in his clothes, and when Christopher turned to him and saw him, he could not help roaring with laughter. Otto was so exhausted that he could not even be angry. Christopher took pity on him, and talked gaily to him. Otto replied with a look of fury. Christopher made him stop at a farm. They dried themselves before a great fire, and drank hot wine. Christopher thought the adventure funny, and tried to laugh at it ; but that was not at all to Otto's taste, and he was morose and silent for the rest of their walk. They came back sulking, and did not shake hands when they parted.

As a result of this prank they did not see each other for more than a week. They were severe in their judgment of each other. But after inflicting punishment on themselves by depriving themselves of one of their Sunday walks, they got so bored that their rancour died away. Christopher made the first advances as usual. Otto condescended to meet them, and they made peace.

In spite of their disagreement it was impossible for them to do without each other. They had many faults ; they were both egoists. But their egoism was naïve ; it knew not the self-seeking of maturity which makes it so repulsive ; it knew not itself even ; it was almost

lovable, and did not prevent them from sincerely loving each other ! Young Otto used to weep on his pillow as he told himself stories of romantic devotion of which he was the hero ; he used to invent pathetic adventures, in which he was strong, valiant, intrepid, and protected Christopher, whom he used to imagine that he adored. Christopher never saw or heard anything beautiful or strange without thinking : “ If only Otto were here ! ” He carried the image of his friend into his whole life, and that image used to be transfigured, and become so gentle, that in spite of all that he knew about him it used to intoxicate him. Certain words of Otto’s which he used to remember long after they were spoken, and to embellish by the way, used to make him tremble with emotion. They used to imitate each other. Otto aped Christopher’s manners, gestures, and writing. Christopher used sometimes to be irritated by the shadow which repeated every word that he said, and dished up his thoughts as though they were its own. But he did not see that he himself was imitating Otto, and copying his way of dressing, and walking, and pronouncing certain words. They were under a fascination. They were infused one in the other ; their hearts were overflowing with tenderness. They trickled over with it on every side like a fountain. Each imagined that his friend was the cause of it. They did not know that it was the waking of their adolescence.

Christopher, who never distrusted anyone, used to leave his papers lying about. But an instinctive modesty made him keep together the drafts of the letters which he scrawled to Otto, and the replies.

But he did not lock them up ; he just placed them between the leaves of one of his music-books, where he felt certain that no one would look for them. He reckoned without his brothers' malice.

He had seen them for some time laughing, and whispering, and looking at him ; they were declaiming to each other fragments of speech which threw them into wild laughter. Christopher could not catch the words, and, following his usual tactics with them, he feigned utter indifference to everything they might do or say. A few words roused his attention ; he thought he recognized them. Soon he was left without doubt that they had read his letters. But when he challenged Ernest and Rodolphe, who were calling each other "My dear soul," with pretended earnestness, he could get nothing from them. The little wretches pretended not to understand, and said that they had the right to call each other whatever they liked. Christopher, who had found all the letters in their places, did not insist farther.

Shortly afterwards he caught Ernest in the act of thieving ; the little beast was rummaging in the drawer of the chest in which Louisa kept her money. Christopher shook him, and took advantage of the opportunity to tell him everything that he had stored up against him. He enumerated, in terms of scant courtesy, the misdeeds of Ernest, and it was not a short catalogue. Ernest took the lecture in bad part ; he replied impudently that Christopher had nothing to reproach him with, and he hinted at unmentionable things in his brother's friendship with Otto. Christopher did not understand ; but when he grasped that Otto was being dragged into the quarrel he demanded an explanation of

Ernest. The boy tittered ; then, when he saw Christopher white with anger, he refused to say any more. Christopher saw that he would obtain nothing in that way ; he sat down, shrugged his shoulders, and affected a profound contempt for Ernest. Ernest, piqued by this, was impudent again ; he set himself to hurt his brother, and set forth a litany of things each more cruel and more vile than the last. Christopher kept a tight hand on himself. When at last he did understand, he saw red ; he leaped from his chair. Ernest had no time to cry out. Christopher had hurled himself on him, and rolled with him into the middle of the room, and beat his head against the tiles. On the frightful cries of the victim, Louisa, Melchior, everybody, came running. They rescued Ernest in a parlous state. Christopher would not loose his prey ; they had to beat and beat him. They called him a savage beast, and he looked it. His eyes were bursting from his head, he was grinding his teeth, and his only thought was to hurl himself again on Ernest. When they asked him what had happened, his fury increased, and he cried out that he would kill him. Ernest also refused to tell.

Christopher could not eat nor sleep. He was shaking with fever, and wept in his bed. It was not only for Otto that he was suffering. A revolution was taking place in him. Ernest had no idea of the hurt that he had been able to do his brother. Christopher was at heart of a puritanical intolerance, which could not admit the dark ways of life, and was discovering them one by one with horror. At fifteen, with his free life and strong instincts, he remained strangely simple. His natural purity and ceaseless toil had protected him.

His brother's words had opened up abyss on abyss before him. Never would he have conceived such infamies, and now that the idea of it had come to him all his joy in loving and being loved was spoiled. Not only his friendship with Otto, but friendship itself was poisoned.

It was much worse when certain sarcastic allusions made him think, perhaps wrongly, that he was the object of the unwholesome curiosity of the town, and especially when, some time afterwards, Melchior made a remark about his walks with Otto. Probably there was no malice in Melchior, but Christopher, on the watch, read hidden meanings into every word, and almost he thought himself guilty. At the same time Otto was passing through a similar crisis.

They tried still to see each other in secret. But it was impossible for them to regain the carelessness of their old relation. Their frankness was spoiled. The two boys who loved each other with a tenderness so fearful that they had never dared exchange a fraternal kiss, and had imagined that there could be no greater happiness than in seeing each other, and in being friends, and sharing each other's dreams, now felt that they were stained and spotted by the suspicion of evil minds. They came to see evil even in the most innocent acts: a look, a hand-clasp—they blushed, they had evil thoughts. Their relation became intolerable.

Without saying anything they saw each other less often. They tried writing to each other, but they set a watch upon their expressions. Their letters became cold and insipid. They grew disheartened. Christopher excused himself on the ground of his work, Otto on the

ground of being too busy, and their correspondence ceased. Soon afterwards Otto left for the University, and the friendship which had lightened a few months of their lives died down and out.

And also, a new love, of which this had been only the forerunner, took possession of Christopher's heart, and made every other light seem pale by its side.

III

MINNA

FOUR or five months before these events Frau Josepha von Kerich, widow of Councillor Stephan von Kerich, had left Berlin, where her husband's duties had hitherto detained them, and settled down with her daughter in the little Rhine town, in her native country. She had an old house, with a large garden, almost a park, which sloped down to the river, not far from Christopher's house. From his attic Christopher could see the heavy branches of the trees hanging over the walls, and the high peak of the red roof with its mossy tiles. A little sloping alley, with hardly room to pass, ran alongside the park to the right ; from there, by climbing a post, you could look over the wall. Christopher did not fail to make use of it. He could then see the grassy avenues, the lawns like open meadows, the trees interlacing and growing wild, and the white front of the house with its shutters obstinately closed. Once or twice a year a gardener made the rounds, and aired the house. But soon Nature resumed her sway over the garden, and silence reigned over all.

That silence impressed Christopher. He used often stealthily to climb up to his watch-tower, and as he grew his eyes, then his nose, then his mouth reached

up to the top of the wall ; now he could put his arms over it if he stood on tiptoe, and, in spite of the discomfort of that position, he used to stay so, with his chin on the wall, looking, listening, while the evening unfolded over the lawns its soft waves of gold, which lit up with bluish rays the shade of the pines. There he could forget himself until he heard footsteps approaching in the street. The night scattered its scents over the garden : lilac in spring, acacia in summer, dead leaves in the autumn. When Christopher was on his way home in the evening from the Palace, however weary he might be, he used to stand by the door to drink in the delicious scent, and it was hard for him to go back to the smells of his room. And often he had played—when he used to play—in the little square with its tufts of grass between the stones, before the gateway of the house of the Kerichs. On each side of the gate grew a chestnut-tree a hundred years old ; his grandfather used to come and sit beneath them, and smoke his pipe, and the children used to use the nuts for missiles and toys.

One morning, as he went up the alley, he climbed up the post as usual. He was thinking of other things, and looked absently. He was just going to climb down when he felt that there was something unusual about it. He looked towards the house. The windows were open ; the sun was shining into the house ; and, although no one was to be seen, the old house seemed to have been roused from its fifteen years' sleep, and to be smiling in its awakening. Christopher went home uneasy in his mind.

At dinner his father talked of what was the topic of the neighbourhood : the arrival of Frau Kerich and her daughter with an incredible quantity of luggage.

The chestnut square was filled with rascals who had turned up to help unload the carts. Christopher was excited by the news, which, in his limited life, was an important event, and returned to his work, trying to imagine the inhabitants of the enchanted house from his father's story, as usual hyperbolic. Then he became absorbed in his work, and had forgotten the whole affair when, just as he was about to go home in the evening, he remembered it all, and he was impelled by curiosity to climb his watch-tower to spy out what might be toward within the walls. He saw nothing but the quiet avenue, in which the motionless trees seemed to be sleeping in the last rays of the sun. In a few moments he had forgotten why he was looking, and abandoned himself as he always did to the sweetness of the silence. That strange place—standing erect, perilously balanced on the top of a post—was meet for dreams. Coming from the ugly alley, stuffy and dark, the sunny gardens were of a magical radiance. His spirit wandered freely through these regions of harmony, and music sang in him ; they lulled him, and he forgot time and material things, and was only concerned to miss none of the whisperings of his heart.

So he dreamed open-eyed and open-mouthed, and he could not have told how long he had been dreaming, for he saw nothing. Suddenly his heart leaped. In front of him, at a bend in an avenue, were two women's faces looking at him. One, a young lady in black, with fine irregular features and fair hair, tall, elegant, with carelessness and indifference in the poise of her head, was looking at him with kind, laughing eyes. The other, a girl of fifteen, also in deep mourning, looked as though she were going to burst out into a fit of wild

laughter ; she was standing a little behind her mother, who, without looking at her, signed to her to be quiet. She covered her lips with her hands, as if she were hard put to it not to burst out laughing. She was a little creature with a fresh face, white, pink, and round-cheeked ; she had a little nose, rather large ; a little mouth, rather wide ; a little rounded chin, firm eyebrows, bright eyes, and a mass of fair hair plaited and wound round her head in a crown to show her rounded neck and her smooth white forehead—a Cranach face.

Christopher was turned to stone by this apparition. He could not go away, but stayed, glued to his post, with his mouth wide open. It was only when he saw the young lady coming towards him with her kindly mocking smile that he wrenched himself away, and jumped—tumbled—down into the alley, dragging with him pieces of plaster from the wall. He heard a kind voice calling him, “ Little boy ! ” and a shout of childish laughter, clear and liquid as the song of a bird. He found himself in the alley on hands and knees, and, after a moment’s bewilderment, he ran away as hard as he could go, as though he was afraid of being pursued. He was ashamed, and his shame kept bursting upon him again when he was alone in his room at home. After that he dared not go down the alley, fearing oddly that they might be lying in wait for him. When he had to go by the house, he kept close to the walls, lowered his head, and almost ran without ever looking back. At the same time he never ceased to think of the two faces that he had seen ; he used to go up to the attic, taking off his shoes so as not to be heard, and he tried his hardest to look out through the skylight in the direction of the Kerichs’ house and park,

although he knew perfectly well that it was impossible to see anything but the tops of the trees and the top-most chimneys.

About a month later he was playing at one of the weekly concerts of the *Hof Musik Verein* a concerto for piano and orchestra of his own composition. He had reached the last movement when he chanced to see in the box facing him Frau and Fräulein Kerich looking at him. He so little expected to see them that he was astounded, and almost missed out his reply to the orchestra. He went on playing mechanically to the end of the piece. When it was finished he saw, although he was not looking in their direction, that Frau and Fräulein Kerich were applauding a little exaggeratedly, as though they wished him to see that they were applauding. He hurried away from the stage. As he was leaving the theatre he saw Frau Kerich in the lobby, separated from him by several rows of people, and she seemed to be waiting for him to pass. It was impossible for him not to see her, but he pretended not to do so, and, brushing his way through, he left hurriedly by the stage-door of the theatre. Then he was angry with himself, for he knew quite well that Frau Kerich meant no harm. But he knew that if it were to do again he would do the same. He was in terror of meeting her in the street. Whenever he saw a figure at a distance that resembled her, he used to turn aside and take another road.

It was she who came to him. She sought him out at home.

One morning when he came back to dinner Louisa proudly told him that a lackey in breeches and livery

had left a letter for him, and she gave him a large black-edged envelope, on the back of which was engraved the Kerich arms. Christopher opened it, and trembled as he read these words :

“Frau Josepha von Kerich requests the pleasure of *Hof Musicus* Christopher Krafft’s company at tea to-day at half-past five.”

“I shall not go,” declared Christopher.

“What !” cried Louisa. “I said that you would go.”

Christopher made a scene, and reproached his mother with meddling in affairs that were no concern of hers.

“The servant waited for a reply. I said that you were free to-day. You have nothing to do then.”

In vain did Christopher lose his temper, and swear that he would not go ; he could not get out of it now. When the appointed time came, he got ready fuming ; in his heart of hearts he was not sorry that chance had so done violence to his own ill-will.

Frau von Kerich had had no difficulty in recognizing in the pianist at the concert the little savage whose shaggy head had appeared over her garden wall on the day of her arrival. She had made inquiries about him of her neighbours, and what she learned about Christopher’s family and the boy’s brave and difficult life had roused interest in him, and a desire to talk to him.

Christopher, trussed up in an absurd coat, which made him look like a country parson, arrived at the house quite ill with shyness. He tried to persuade himself that Frau and Fräulein Kerich had had no time to remark his features on the day when they had first

seen him. A servant led him down a long corridor, thickly carpeted, so that his footsteps made no sound, to a room with a glass-panelled door which opened on to the garden. It was raining a little, and cold ; a good fire was burning in the fireplace. Near the window, through which he had a peep of the wet trees in the mist, the two ladies were sitting. Frau Kerich was working and her daughter was reading a book when Christopher entered. When they saw him they exchanged a sly look.

"They know me again," thought Christopher, abashed.

He bobbed awkwardly, and went on bobbing.

Frau von Kerich smiled cheerfully, and held out her hand.

"Good-day, my dear neighbour," she said. "I am glad to see you. Since I heard you at the concert I have been wanting to tell you how much pleasure you gave me. And as the only way of telling you was to invite you here, I hope you will forgive me for having done so."

In the kindly, conventional words of welcome there was so much cordiality, in spite of a hidden sting of irony, that Christopher grew more at his ease.

"They do not know me again," he thought, comforted.

Frau von Kerich presented her daughter, who had closed her book and was looking interestedly at Christopher.

"My daughter Minna," she said. "She wanted so much to see you."

"But, mamma," said Minna, "it is not the first time that we have seen each other."

And she laughed aloud.

"They do know me again," thought Christopher, crestfallen.

"True," said Frau von Kerich, laughing too, "you paid us a visit the day we came."

At these words the girl laughed again, and Christopher looked so pitiful that when Minna looked at him she laughed more than ever. She could not control herself, and she laughed until she cried. Frau von Kerich tried to stop her, but she, too, could not help laughing, and Christopher, in spite of his constraint, fell victim to the contagiousness of it. Their merriment was irresistible ; it was impossible to take offence at it. But Christopher lost countenance altogether when Minna caught her breath again, and asked him whatever he could be doing on the wall. She was tickled by his uneasiness. He murmured, altogether at a loss. Frau von Kerich came to his aid, and turned the conversation by pouring out tea.

She questioned him amiably about his life. But he did not gain confidence. He could not sit down ; he could not hold his cup, which threatened to upset ; and whenever they offered him water, milk, sugar, or cakes he thought that he had to get up hurriedly and bow his thanks, stiff, trussed up in his frock-coat, collar, and tie, like a tortoise in its shell, not daring and not being able to turn his head to right or left, and overwhelmed by Frau von Kerich's innumerable questions, and the warmth of her manner, frozen by Minna's looks, which he felt were taking in his features, his hands, his movements, his clothes. They made him even more uncomfortable by trying to put him at his ease—Frau von Kerich by her flow of words, Minna by the

coquettish eyes which instinctively she made at him to amuse herself.

Finally they gave up trying to get anything more from him than bows and monosyllables, and Frau von Kerich, who had the whole burden of the conversation, asked him, when she was worn out, to play the piano. Much more shy of them than of a concert audience, he played an adagio of Mozart. But his very shyness, the uneasiness which was beginning to fill his heart from the company of the two women, the ingenuous emotion with which his bosom swelled, which made him happy and unhappy, were in tune with the tenderness and youthful modesty of the music, and gave it the charm of spring. Frau von Kerich was moved by it ; she said so with the exaggerated words of praise customary among men and women of the world ; she was none the less sincere for that, and the very excess of the flattery was sweet coming from such charming lips. Naughty Minna said nothing, and looked astonished at the boy who was so stupid when he talked, but was so eloquent with his fingers. Christopher felt their sympathy, and grew bold under it. He went on playing ; then, half turning towards Minna, with an awkward smile and without raising his eyes, he said timidly :

“ This is what I was doing on the wall.”

He played a little piece in which he had, in fact, developed the musical ideas which had come to him in his favourite spot as he looked into the garden, not, be it said, on the evening when he had seen Minna and Frau von Kerich—for some obscure reason, known only to his heart, he was trying to persuade himself that it was so—but long before, and in the calm rhythm

of the *andante con moto*, there were to be found the serene impression of the singing of birds, roaring of beasts, and the majestic slumber of the great trees in the peace of the sunset.

The two hearers listened delightedly. When he had finished Frau von Kerich rose, took his hands with her usual vivacity, and thanked him effusively. Minna clapped her hands, and cried that it was "admirable," and that to make him compose other works as "sublime" as that she would have a ladder placed against the wall, so that he might work there at his ease. Frau von Kerich told Christopher not to listen to silly Minna; she begged him to come as often as he liked to her garden, since he loved it, and she added that he need never bother to call on them if he found it tiresome.

"You need never bother to come and see us," added Minna. "Only if you do not come, beware!"

She wagged her finger in menace.

Minna was possessed by no imperious desire that Christopher should come to see her, or should even follow the rules of politeness with regard to herself, but it pleased her to produce a little effect which instinctively she felt to be charming.

Christopher blushed delightedly. Frau von Kerich won him completely by the tact with which she spoke of his mother and grandfather, whom she had known. The warmth and kindness of the two ladies touched his heart; he exaggerated their easy kindness, their worldly graciousness, in his desire to think it heartfelt and deep. He began to tell them, with his naïve trustfulness, of his plans and his wretchedness. He did not notice that more than an

hour had passed, and he jumped with surprise when a servant came and announced dinner. But his confusion turned to happiness when Frau von Kerich told him to stay and dine with them, like the good friends that they were going to be, and were already. A place was laid for him between the mother and daughter, and at table his talents did not show to such advantage as at the piano. That part of his education had been much neglected ; it was his impression that eating and drinking were the essential things at table, and not the manner of them. And so tidy Minna looked at him, pouting and a little horrified.

They thought that he would go immediately after supper. But he followed them into the little room, and sat with them, and had no idea of going. Minna stifled her yawns, and made signs to her mother. He did not notice them because he was dumb with his happiness, and thought they were like himself—because Minna, when she looked at him, made eyes at him from habit—and finally, once he was seated, he did not quite know how to get up and take his leave. He would have stayed all night had not Frau von Kerich sent him away herself, without ceremony, but kindly.

He went, carrying in his heart the soft light of the brown eyes of Frau von Kerich and the blue eyes of Minna ; on his hands he felt the sweet contact of soft fingers, soft as flowers, and a subtle perfume, which he had never before breathed, enveloped him, bewildered him, brought him almost to swooning.

He went again two days later, as was arranged, to give Minna a music-lesson. Thereafter he went regularly twice a week in the morning on this excuse, and

very often he went again in the evening to play and talk.

Frau von Kerich was glad to see him. She was a clever and a kind woman. She was thirty-five when she lost her husband, and although young in body and at heart, she was not sorry to withdraw from the world in which she had gone far since her marriage. Perhaps she left it the more easily because she had found it very amusing, and thought wisely that she could not both eat her cake and have it. She was devoted to the memory of Herr von Kerich, not that she had felt anything like love for him when they married ; good fellowship was enough for her ; she was of an easy temper and an affectionate disposition.

She had given herself up to her daughter's education ; but the same moderation which she had had in her love held in check the impulsive and morbid quality which is sometimes in motherhood, when the child is the only creature upon whom the woman can expend her jealous need of loving and being loved. She loved Minna much, but was clear in her judgment of her, and did not conceal any of her imperfections any more than she tried to deceive herself about herself. Witty and clever, she had a keen eye for discovering at a glance the weakness, and ridiculous side, of any person ; she took great pleasure in it, without ever being the least malicious, for she was as indulgent as she was scoffing, and while she laughed at people she loved to be of use to them.

Young Christopher gave food both to her kindness and to her critical mind. During the first days of her sojourn in the little town, when her mourning kept her out of society, Christopher was a distraction for her—

primarily by his talent. She loved music, although she was no musician ; she found in it a physical and moral well-being in which her thoughts could idly sink into a pleasant melancholy. Sitting by the fire—while Christopher played—a book in her hands, and smiling vaguely, she took a silent delight in the mechanical movements of his fingers, and the purposeless wanderings of her reverie, hovering among the sad, sweet images of the past.

But more even than the music, the musician interested her. She was clever enough to be conscious of Christopher's rare gifts, although she was not capable of perceiving his really original quality. It gave her a curious pleasure to watch the waking of those mysterious fires which she saw kindling in him. She had quickly appreciated his moral qualities, his uprightness, his courage, the sort of Stoicism in him, so touching in a child. But for that she did not view him the less with the usual perspicacity of her sharp, mocking eyes. His awkwardness, his ugliness, his little ridiculous qualities amused her ; she did not take him altogether seriously ; she did not take many things seriously. Christopher's antic outbursts, his violence, his fantastic humour, made her think sometimes that he was a little unbalanced ; she saw in him one of the Kraffts, honest men and good musicians, but always a little wrong in the head. Her light irony escaped Christopher ; he was conscious only of Frau von Kerich's kindness. He was so unused to anyone being kind to him ! Although his duties at the Palace brought him into daily contact with the world, poor Christopher had remained a little savage, untutored and uneducated. The selfishness of the Court was only concerned in turning

him to its profit, and not to help him in any way. He went to the Palace, sat at the piano, played, and went away again, and nobody ever took the trouble to talk to him, except absently to pay him some banal compliment. Since his grandfather's death, no one, either at home or outside, had ever thought of helping him to learn the conduct of life, or to be a man. He suffered cruelly from his ignorance and the roughness of his manners. He went through an agony and bloody sweat to shape himself alone, but he did not succeed. Books, conversation, example—all were lacking. He would fain have confessed his distress to a friend, but could not bring himself to do so. Even with Otto he had not dared, because at the first words that he had uttered Otto had assumed a tone of disdainful superiority which had burned into him like hot iron.

And now with Frau von Kerich it all became easy. Of her own accord, without his having to ask anything—it cost Christopher's pride so much!—she showed him gently what he should not do, told him what he ought to do, advised him how to dress, eat, walk, talk, and never passed over any fault of manners, taste, or language; and he could not be hurt by it, so light and careful was her touch in the handling of the boy's easily injured vanity. She took in hand also his literary education without seeming to be concerned with it; she never showed surprise at his strange ignorance, but never let slip an opportunity of correcting his mistakes simply, easily, as if it were natural for him to have been in error; and, instead of alarming him with pedantic lessons, she conceived the idea of employing their evening meetings by making Minna or Christopher read passages of history, or of the poets,

German and foreign. She treated him as a son of the house, with a few fine shades of patronizing familiarity which he never saw. She was even concerned with his clothes, gave him new ones, knitted him a woollen comforter, presented him with little toilet things, and all so gently that he never was put about by her care or her presents. In short, she gave him all the little attentions and the quasi-maternal care which come to every good woman instinctively for a child who is entrusted to her, or trusts himself to her, without her having any deep feeling for it. But Christopher thought that all the tenderness was given to him personally, and he was filled with gratitude; he would break out into little awkward, passionate speeches, which seemed a little ridiculous to Frau von Kerich, though they did not fail to give her pleasure.

With Minna his relation was very different. When Christopher met her again at her first lesson, he was still intoxicated by his memories of the preceding evening, and of the girl's soft looks, and he was greatly surprised to find her an altogether different person from the girl he had seen only a few hours before. She hardly looked at him, and did not listen to what he said, and when she raised her eyes to him, he saw in them so icy a coldness that he was chilled by it. He tortured himself for a long time to discover wherein lay his offence. He had given none, and Minna's feelings were neither more nor less favourable than on the preceding day; just as she had been then, Minna was completely indifferent to him. If on the first occasion she had smiled upon him in welcome, it was from a girl's instinctive coquetry, who delights to try the power of her eyes on the first comer, be it only a

trimmed poodle who turns up to fill her idle hours. But since the preceding day the too-easy conquest had already lost interest for her. She had subjected Christopher to a severe scrutiny, and she thought him an ugly boy, poor, ill-bred, who played the piano well, though he had ugly hands, held his fork at table abominably, and ate his fish with a knife. Then he seemed to her very uninteresting. She wanted to have music-lessons from him ; she wanted, even, to amuse herself with him, because for the moment she had no other companion, and because in spite of her pretensions of being no longer a child, she had still in gusts a crazy longing to play, a need of expending her superfluous gaiety, which was, in her as in her mother, still further roused by the constraint imposed by their mourning. But she took no more account of Christopher than of a domestic animal, and if it still happened occasionally during the days of her greatest coldness that she made eyes at him, it was purely out of forgetfulness, and because she was thinking of something else, or simply so as not to get out of practice. And when she looked at him like that Christopher's heart used to leap. It is doubtful if she saw it ; she was telling herself stories. For she was at the age when we delight the senses with sweet fluttering dreams. She was for ever absorbed in thoughts of love, filled with a curiosity which was only innocent from ignorance. And she only thought of love, as a well-taught young lady should, in terms of marriage. Her ideal was far from having taken definite shape. Sometimes she dreamed of marrying a lieutenant, sometimes of marrying a poet, properly sublime, *à la* Schiller. One project devoured another, and the last was always welcomed

with the same gravity and just the same amount of conviction. For the rest all of them were quite ready to give way before a profitable reality. For it is wonderful to see how easily romantic girls forget their dreams, as a rule when something less ideal, but more certain, appears before them.

As it was, sentimental Minna was, in spite of all, calm and cold. In spite of her aristocratic name, and the pride with which the ennobling particle filled her, she had the soul of a little German housewife in the exquisite days of adolescence.

Naturally Christopher did not in the least understand the complicated mechanism—more complicated in appearance than in reality—of the feminine heart. He was often baffled by the ways of his friends, but he was so happy in loving them that he credited them with all that disturbed and made him sad with them, so as to persuade himself that he was as much loved by them as he loved them himself. A word or an affectionate look plunged him in delight. Sometimes he was so bowled over by it that he would burst into tears.

Sitting by the table in the quiet little room, with Frau von Kerich a few yards away sewing by the light of the lamp—Minna reading on the other side of the table, and they not talking, he looking through the half-open garden-door at the gravel of the avenue glistening under the moon, and a soft murmur coming from the tops of the trees—his heart would be so full of happiness that suddenly, for no reason, he would leap from his chair, throw himself at Frau von Kerich's feet, seize her hand, needle or no needle,

cover it with kisses, press it to his lips, his cheeks, his eyes, and sob. Minna would raise her eyes, lightly shrug her shoulders, and make a face. Frau von Kerich would smile down at the big boy grovelling at her feet, and pat his head with her free hand, and say to him in her pretty voice, affectionately and ironically :

“ Well, well, old fellow ! What is it ? ”

Oh, the sweetness of that voice, that peace, that silence, that soft air in which were no shouts, no roughness, no violence, that oasis in the harsh desert of life, and—heroic light gilding with its rays people and things—the light of the enchanted world conjured up by the reading of the Divine poets ! Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, springs of strength, of sorrow, and of love ! . . .

Minna, with her head down over the book, and her face faintly coloured by her animated delivery, would read in her fresh voice, with its slight lisp, and try to sound important when she spoke in the characters of warriors and Kings. Sometimes Frau von Kerich herself would take the book ; then she would lend to tragic histories the spiritual and tender graciousness of her own nature, but most often she would listen, lying back in her chair, her never-ending needlework in her lap ; she would smile at her own thoughts, for always she would come back to them through every book.

Christopher also had tried to read, but he had had to give it up ; he stammered, stumbled over the words, skipped the punctuation, seemed to understand nothing, and would be so moved that he would have to stop in the middle of the pathetic passages, feeling

tears coming. Then in a tantrum he would throw the book down on the table, and his two friends would burst out laughing. . . . How he loved them ! He carried the image of them everywhere with him, and they were mingled with the persons in Shakespeare and Goethe. He could hardly distinguish between them. Some fragrant word of the poets which called up from the depths of his being passionate emotions could not in him be severed from the beloved lips that had made him hear it for the first time. Even twenty years later he could never read Egmont or Romeo, or see them played, without there leaping up in him at certain lines the memory of those quiet evenings, those dreams of happiness, and the beloved faces of Frau von Kerich and Minna.

He would spend hours looking at them in the evening when they were reading ; in the night when he was dreaming in his bed, awake, with his eyes closed ; during the day, when he was dreaming at his place in the orchestra, playing mechanically with his eyes half closed. He had the most innocent tenderness for them, and, knowing nothing of love, he thought he was in love. But he did not quite know whether it was with the mother or the daughter. He went into the matter gravely, and did not know which to choose. And yet, as it seemed to him that he must at all costs make his choice, he inclined towards Frau von Kerich. And he did in fact discover, as soon as he had made up his mind to it, that it was she that he loved. He loved her quick eyes, the absent smile upon her half-open lips, her pretty forehead, so young in seeming, and the parting to one side in her fine, soft hair, her rather husky voice, with its little cough, her motherly hands,

the elegance of her movements, and her mysterious soul. He would thrill with happiness when, sitting by his side, she would kindly explain to him the meaning of some passage in a book which he did not understand ; she would lay her hand on Christopher's shoulder ; he would feel the warmth of her fingers, her breath on his cheek, the sweet perfume of her body ; he would listen in ecstasy, lose all thought of the book, and understand nothing at all. She would see that and ask him to repeat what she had said ; then he would say nothing, and she would laughingly be angry, and tap his nose with her book, telling him that he would always be a little donkey. To that he would reply that he did not care so long as he was *her* little donkey, and she did not drive him out of her house. She would pretend to make objections ; then she would say that although he was an ugly little donkey, and very stupid, she would agree to keep him—and perhaps even to love him—although he was good for nothing, if at the least he would be just *good*. Then they would both laugh, and he would go swimming in his joy.

When he discovered that he loved Frau von Kerich, Christopher broke away from Minna. He was beginning to be irritated by her coldness and disdain, and as, by dint of seeing her often, he had been emboldened little by little to resume his freedom of manner with her, he did not conceal his exasperation from her. She loved to sting him, and he would reply sharply. They were always saying unkind things to each other, and Frau von Kerich only laughed at them. Christopher, who never got the better in such passages of words, used sometimes to issue from them

so infuriated that he thought he detested Minna ; and he persuaded himself that he only went to her house again because of Frau von Kerich.

He went on giving her music lessons. Twice a week, from nine to ten in the morning, he superintended the girl's scales and exercises. The room in which they did this was Minna's studio—an odd workroom, which, with an amusing fidelity, reflected the singular disorder of her little feminine mind.

On the table were little figures of musical cats—a whole orchestra—one playing a violin, another the violoncello—a little pocket-mirror, toilet things and writing things, tidily arranged. On the shelves were tiny busts of musicians—Beethoven frowning, Wagner with his velvet cap, and the Apollo Belvedere. On the mantelpiece, by a frog smoking a red pipe, a paper fan on which was painted the Bayreuth Theatre. On the two bookshelves were a few books—Lübke, Mommsen, Schiller, “*Sans Famille*,” Jules Verne, Montaigne. On the walls large photographs of the Sistine Madonna, and pictures by Herkomer, edged with blue and green ribbons. There was also a view of a Swiss hotel in a frame of silver thistles ; and above all, everywhere in profusion, in every corner of the room, photographs of officers, tenors, conductors, girl-friends, all with inscriptions, almost all with verse—or at least what is accepted as verse in Germany. In the centre of the room, on a marble pillar, was enthroned a bust of Brahms, with a beard ; and above the piano, little plush monkeys and cotillion trophies hung by threads.

Minna would arrive late, her eyes still puffy with sleep, sulky ; she would hardly reach out her hand to Christopher, coldly bid him good-day, and, without a

word, gravely and with dignity sit down at the piano. When she was alone, it pleased her to play interminable scales, for that allowed her agreeably to prolong her half-somnolent condition, and the dreams which she was spinning for herself. But Christopher would compel her to fix her attention on difficult exercises, and so sometimes she would avenge herself by playing them as badly as she could. She was a fair musician, but she did not like music—like many German women. But, like them, she thought she ought to like it, and she took her lessons conscientiously enough, except for certain moments of diabolical malice indulged in to enrage her master. She could enrage him much more by the icy indifference with which she set herself to her task. But the worst was when she took it into her head that it was her duty to throw her soul into an expressive passage: then she would become sentimental and feel nothing.

Young Christopher, sitting by her side, was not very polite. He never paid her compliments—far from it. She resented that, and never let any remark pass without answering it. She would argue about everything that he said, and when she made a mistake she would insist that she was playing what was written. He would get cross, and they would go on exchanging ungracious words and impertinences. With her eyes on the keys, she never ceased to watch Christopher and enjoy his fury. As a relief from boredom she would invent stupid little tricks, with no other object than to interrupt the lesson and to annoy Christopher. She would pretend to choke, so as to make herself interesting; she would have a fit of coughing, or she would have something very important to say to the

maid. Christopher knew that she was play-acting ; and Minna knew that Christopher knew that she was play-acting ; and it amused her, for Christopher could not tell her what he was thinking.

One day, when she was indulging in this amusement and was coughing languidly, hiding her mouth in her handkerchief, as if she were on the point of choking, but in reality watching Christopher's exasperation out of the corner of her eye, she conceived the ingenious idea of letting the handkerchief fall, so as to make Christopher pick it up, which he did with the worst grace in the world. She rewarded him with a "Thank you !" in her grand manner, which nearly made him explode.

She thought the game too good not to be repeated. Next day she did it again. Christopher did not budge ; he was boiling with rage. She waited a moment, and then said in an injured tone :

"Will you please pick up my handkerchief ?"

Christopher could not contain himself.

"I am not your servant !" he cried roughly. "Pick it up yourself !"

Minna choked with rage. She got up suddenly from her stool, which fell over.

"Oh, this is too much !" she said, and angrily thumped the piano ; and she left the room in a fury.

Christopher waited. She did not come back. He was ashamed of what he had done ; he felt that he had behaved like a little cad. And he was at the end of his tether ; she made fun of him too impudently ! He was afraid lest Minna should complain to her mother, and he should be for ever banished from Frau von Kerich's thoughts. He knew not what to do ; for if

he was sorry for his brutality, no power on earth would have made him ask pardon.

He came again on the chance the next day, although he thought that Minna would refuse to take her lesson. But Minna, who was too proud to complain to anybody—Minna, whose conscience was not shielded against reproach—appeared again, after making him wait five minutes more than usual ; and she sat down at the piano, stiff, upright, without turning her head or saying a word, as though Christopher no longer existed for her. But she did not fail to take her lesson, and all the subsequent lessons, because she knew very well that Christopher was a fine musician, and that she ought to learn to play the piano properly if she wished to be—what she wished to be—a well-bred young lady of finished education.

But how bored she was ! How they bored each other !

One misty morning in March, when little flakes of snow were flying, like feathers, in the grey air, they were in the studio. It was hardly daylight. Minna was arguing, as usual, about a false note that she had struck, and pretending that it "was written so." Although he knew perfectly well that she was lying, Christopher bent over the book to look at the passage in question closely. Her hand was on the rack, and she did not move it. His lips were near her hand. He tried to read and could not ; he was looking at something else—a thing soft, transparent, like the petals of a flower. Suddenly—he did not know what he was thinking of—he pressed his lips as hard as he could on the little hand.

They were both dumbfounded by it. He flung backwards ; she withdrew her hand—both blushing. They said no word ; they did not look at each other. After a moment of confused silence she began to play again ; she was very uneasy : her bosom rose and fell as though she were under some weight : she struck wrong note after wrong note. He did not notice it : he was more uneasy than she. His temples throbbed ; he heard nothing ; he knew not what she was playing ; and, to break the silence, he made a few random remarks in a choking voice. He thought that he was for ever lost in Minna's opinion. He was confounded by what he had done, thought it stupid and rude. The lesson-hour over, he left Minna without looking at her, and even forgot to say good-bye. She did not mind. She had no thought now of deeming Christopher ill-mannered ; and if she made so many mistakes in playing, it was because all the time she was watching him out of the corner of her eye with astonishment, and curiosity, and—for the first time—sympathy.

When she was left alone, instead of going to look for her mother as usual, she shut herself up in her room and examined this extraordinary event. She sat with her face in her hands in front of the mirror. Her eyes seemed to her soft and gleaming. She bit gently at her lip in the effort of thinking. And as she looked complacently at her pretty face, she visualized the scene, and blushed and smiled. At dinner she was animated and merry. She refused to go out at once, and stayed in the drawing-room for part of the afternoon ; she had some work in her hand, and did not make ten stitches without a mistake, but what did that matter ! In a corner of the room, with her

back turned to her mother, she smiled ; or, under a sudden impulse to let herself go, she pranced about the room and sang at the top of her voice. Frau von Kerich started and called her mad. Minna flung her arms round her neck, shaking with laughter, and hugged and kissed her.

In the evening, when she went to her room, it was a long time before she went to bed. She went on looking at herself in the mirror, trying to remember, and having thought all through the day of the same thing—thinking of nothing. She undressed slowly ; she stopped every moment, sitting on the bed, trying to remember what Christopher was like. It was a Christopher of fantasy who appeared, and now he did not seem nearly so uncouth to her. She went to bed and put out the light. Ten minutes later the scene of the morning rushed back into her mind, and she burst out laughing. Her mother got up softly and opened the door, thinking that, against orders, she was reading in bed. She found Minna lying quietly in her bed, with her eyes wide open in the dim candlelight.

“What is it ?” she asked. “What is amusing you ?”

“Nothing,” said Minna gravely. “I was thinking.”

“You are very lucky to find your own company so amusing. But go to sleep.”

“Yes, mamma,” replied Minna meekly. Inside herself she was grumbling : “Go away ! Do go away !” until the door was closed, and she could go on enjoying her dreams. She fell into a sweet drowsiness. When she was nearly asleep, she leaped for joy :

“He loves me. . . . What happiness ! How good of him to love me ! . . . How I love him !”

She kissed her pillow and went fast asleep.

When next they were together Christopher was surprised at Minna's amiability. She gave him "Good-day," and asked him how he was in a very soft voice ; she sat at the piano, looking wise and modest ; she was an angel of docility. There were none of her naughty schoolgirl's tricks, but she listened religiously to Christopher's remarks, acknowledged that they were right, gave little timid cries herself when she made a mistake, and set herself to be more accurate. Christopher could not understand it. In a very short time she made astounding progress. Not only did she play better, but with musical feeling. Little as he was given to flattery, he had to pay her a compliment. She blushed with pleasure, and thanked him for it with a look tearful with gratitude. She took pains with her toilet for him ; she wore ribbons of an exquisite shade ; she gave Christopher little smiles and soft glances, which he disliked, for they irritated him, and moved him to the depths of his soul. And now it was she who made conversation, but there was nothing childish in what she said ; she talked gravely, and quoted the poets in a pedantic and pretentious way. He hardly ever replied ; he was ill at ease. This new Minna that he did not know astonished and disquieted him.

Always she watched him. She was waiting. . . . For what ? . . . Did she know herself ? . . . She was waiting for him to do it again. He took good care not to, for he was convinced that he had behaved like a clod ; he seemed never to give a thought to it. She grew restless, and one day when he was sitting quietly at a respectful distance from her dangerous little paws,

she was seized with impatience : with a movement so quick that she had no time to think of it, she herself thrust her little hand against his lips. He was staggered by it, then furious and ashamed. But none the less he kissed it very passionately. Her naive effrontery enraged him ; he was on the point of leaving her there and then.

But he could not. He was entrapped. Whirling thoughts rushed in his mind ; he could make nothing of them. Like mists ascending from a valley they rose from the depths of his heart. He wandered hither and thither at random through this mist of love, and whatever he did, he did but turn round and round an obscure fixed idea, a Desire unknown, terrible and fascinating as a flame to an insect. It was the sudden eruption of the blind forces of Nature.

They passed through a period of waiting. They watched each other, desired each other, were fearful of each other. They were uneasy. But they did not for that desist from their little hostilities and sulki-nesses ; but there were no more familiarities between them ; they were silent. Each was busy constructing their love in silence.

Love has curious retro-active effects. As soon as Christopher discovered that he loved Minna, he discovered at the same time that he had always loved her. For three months they had been seeing each other almost every day without ever suspecting the existence of their love. But from the day when he did actually love her, he was absolutely convinced that he had loved her from all eternity.

It was a good thing for him to have discovered at

last *whom* he loved. He had loved for so long without knowing whom ! It was a sort of relief to him, like a sick man, who, suffering from a general illness, vague and enervating, sees it become definite in sharp pain in some portion of his body. Nothing is more wearing than love without a definite object ; it eats away and saps the strength like a fever. A known passion leads the mind to excess ; that is exhausting, but at least one knows why. It is an excess ; it is not a wasting away. Anything rather than emptiness.

Although Minna had given Christopher good reason to believe that she was not indifferent to him, he did not fail to torture himself with the idea that she despised him. They had never had any very clear idea of each other, but this idea had never been more confused and false than it was now ; it consisted of a series of strange fantasies which could never be made to agree, for they passed from one extreme to the other, endowing each other in turn with faults and charms which they did not possess—charms when they were parted, faults when they were together. In either case they were wide of the mark.

They did not know themselves what they desired. For Christopher his love took shape as that thirst for tenderness, imperious, absolute, demanding reciprocation, which had burned in him since childhood, which he demanded from others, and wished to impose on them by will or force. Sometimes this despotic desire of full sacrifice of himself and others—especially others, perhaps—was mingled with gusts of a brutal and obscure desire, which set him whirling, and he did not understand it. Minna, curious above all things, and delighted to have a romance, tried to extract as much

pleasure as possible from it for her vanity and sentimentality ; she tricked herself whole-heartedly as to what she was feeling. A great part of their love was purely literary. They fed on the books they had read, and were for ever ascribing to themselves feelings which they did not possess.

But the moment was to come when all these little lies and small egoisms were to vanish away before the divine light of love. A day, an hour, a few seconds of eternity. . . . And it was so unexpected ! . . .

One evening they were alone and talking. The room was growing dark. Their conversation took a serious turn. They talked of the infinite, of Life, and Death. It made a larger frame for their little passion. Minna complained of her loneliness, which led naturally to Christopher's answer that she was not so lonely as she thought.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "That is only words. Everyone lives for himself ; no one is interested in you ; nobody loves you."

Silence.

"And I?" said Christopher suddenly, pale with emotion.

Impulsive Minna jumped to her feet, and took his hands.

The door opened. They flung apart. Frau von Kerich entered. Christopher buried himself in a book, which he held upside down. Minna bent over her work, and pricked her finger with her needle.

They were not alone together for the rest of the evening, and they were afraid of being left. When Frau von Kerich got up to look for something in the

next room, Minna, not usually obliging, ran to fetch it for her, and Christopher took advantage of her absence to take his leave without saying good-night to her.

Next day they met again, impatient to resume their interrupted conversation. They did not succeed. Yet circumstances were favourable to them. They went a walk with Frau von Kerich, and had plenty of opportunity for talking as much as they liked. But Christopher could not speak, and he was so unhappy that he stayed as far away as possible from Minna. And she pretended not to notice his discourtesy ; but she was piqued by it, and showed it. When Christopher did at last contrive to utter a few words, she listened icily ; he had hardly the courage to finish his sentence. They were coming to the end of the walk. Time was flying. And he was wretched at not having been able to make use of it.

A week passed. They thought they had mistaken their feeling for each other. They were not sure but they had dreamed the scene of that evening. Minna was resentful against Christopher. Christopher was afraid of meeting her alone. They were colder to each other than ever.

Came a day when it had rained all morning and part of the afternoon. They had stayed in the house without speaking, reading, yawning, looking out of the window ; they were bored and cross. About four o'clock the sky cleared. They ran into the garden. They leaned their elbows on the terrace wall, and looked down at the lawns sloping to the river. The earth was steaming ; a soft mist was ascending to the sun ; little raindrops glittered on the grass ; the smell of the damp earth and the perfume of the flowers

intermingled ; around them buzzed a golden swarm of bees. They were side by side, not looking at each other ; they could not bring themselves to break the silence. A bee came up and clung awkwardly to a clump of glycine heavy with rain, and sent a shower of water down on them. They both laughed, and at once they felt that they were no longer cross with each other, and were friends again. But still they did not look at each other.

Suddenly, without turning her head, she took his hand, and said :

“ Come ! ”

She led him quickly to the little labyrinth with its box-bordered paths, which was in the middle of the grove. They climbed up the slope, slipping on the soaking ground, and the wet trees shook out their branches over them. Near the top she stopped to breathe.

“ Wait . . . wait . . . ” she said in a low voice, trying to take breath.

He looked at her. She was looking away ; she was smiling, breathing hard, with her lips parted ; her hand was trembling in Christopher's. They felt the blood throbbing in their linked hands and their trembling fingers. Around them all was silent. The pale shoots of the trees were quivering in the sun ; a gentle rain dropped from the leaves with silvery sounds, and in the sky were the shrill cries of swallows.

She turned her head towards him ; it was a lightning flash. She flung her arms about his neck ; he flung himself into her arms.

“ Minna ! Minna ! My darling ! . . . ”

“ I love you, Christopher ! I love you ! ”

They sat on a wet wooden seat. They were filled with love, sweet, profound, absurd. Everything else had vanished. No more egoism, no more vanity, no more reservation. Love, love—that is what their laughing, tearful eyes were saying. The cold coquette of a girl, the proud boy, were devoured with the need of self-sacrifice, of giving, of suffering, of dying for each other. They did not know each other ; they were not the same ; everything was changed ; their hearts, their faces, their eyes, gave out a radiance of the most touching kindness and tenderness. Moments of purity, of self-denial, of absolute giving of themselves, which through life will never return !

After a desperate murmuring of words and passionate promises to belong to each other for ever, after kisses and incoherent words of delight, they saw that it was late, and they ran back hand in hand, almost falling in the narrow paths, bumping into trees, feeling nothing, blind and drunk with the joy of it.

When he left her he did not go home ; he could not have gone to sleep. He left the town, and walked over the fields ; he walked blindly through the night. The air was fresh, the country dark and deserted. A screech-owl hooted shrilly. Christopher went on like a sleep-walker. The little lights of the town quivered on the plain, and the stars in the dark sky. He sat on a wall by the road and suddenly burst into tears. He did not know why. He was too happy, and the excess of his joy was compounded of sadness and delight ; there was in it thankfulness for his happiness, pity for those who were not happy, a melancholy and sweet feeling of the frailty of things, the mad joy of living. He wept for delight, and slept in the midst of his tears. When

he awoke dawn was peeping. White mists floated over the river, and veiled the town, where Minna, worn out, was sleeping, while in her heart was the light of her smile of happiness.

They contrived to meet again in the garden next morning, and told their love once more, but now the divine unconsciousness of it all was gone. She was a little playing the part of the girl in love, and he, though more sincere, was also playing a part. They talked of what their life should be. He regretted his poverty and humble estate. She affected to be generous, and enjoyed her generosity. She said that she cared nothing for money. That was true, for she knew nothing about it, having never known the lack of it. He promised that he would become a great artist ; that she thought fine and amusing, like a novel. She thought it her duty to behave really like a woman in love. She read poetry ; she was sentimental. He was touched by the infection. He took pains with his dress ; he was absurd ; he set a guard upon his speech ; he was pretentious. Frau von Kerich watched him and laughed, and asked herself what could have made him so stupid.

But they had moments of marvellous poetry, and these would suddenly burst upon them out of dull days, like sunshine through a mist. A look, a gesture, a meaningless word, and they were bathed in happiness ; they had their good-byes in the evening on the dimly-lighted stairs, and their eyes would seek each other, divine each other through the half darkness, and the thrill of their hands as they touched, the trembling in their voices, all those little nothings, that fed their

memory at night, as they slept so lightly that the chiming of each hour would awake them, and their hearts would sing "I am loved," like the murmuring of a stream.

They discovered the charm of things. Spring smiled with a marvellous sweetness. The heavens were brilliant, the air was soft, as they had never been before. All the town—the red roofs, the old walls, the cobbled streets—showed with a kindly charm that moved Christopher. At night, when everybody was asleep, Minna would get up from her bed, and stand by the window, drowsy and feverish. And in the afternoon, when he was not there, she would sit in a swing, and dream, with a book on her knees, her eyes half closed, sleepy and lazily happy, mind and body hovering in the spring air. She would spend hours at the piano, with a patience exasperating to others, going over and over again scales and passages which made her turn pale and cold with emotion. She would weep when she heard Schumann's music. She felt full of pity and kindness for all creatures, and so did he. They would give money stealthily to poor people whom they met in the street, and would then exchange glances of compassion; they were happy in their kindness.

To tell the truth, they were kind only by fits and starts. Minna suddenly discovered how sad was the humble life of devotion of old Frida, who had been a servant in the house since her mother's childhood, and at once she ran and hugged her, to the great astonishment of the good old creature, who was busy mending the linen in the kitchen. But that did not keep her from speaking harshly to her a few hours later, when

Frida did not come at once on the sound of the bell. And Christopher, who was consumed with love for all humanity, and would turn aside so as not to crush an insect, was entirely indifferent to his own family. By a strange reaction he was colder and more curt with them the more affectionate he was to all other creatures ; he hardly gave thought to them ; he spoke abruptly to them, and found no interest in seeing them. Both in Christopher and Minna their kindness was only a surfeit of tenderness which overflowed at intervals to the benefit of the first comer. Except for these overflowings they were more egoistic than ever, for their minds were filled only with the one thought, and everything was brought back to that.

How much of Christopher's life was filled with the girl's face ! What emotion was in him when he saw her white frock in the distance, when he was looking for her in the garden ; when at the theatre, sitting a few yards away from their empty places, he heard the door of their box open, and the mocking voice that he knew so well ; when in some outside conversation the dear name of Kerich cropped up ! He would go pale and blush ; for a moment or two he would see and hear nothing. And then there would be a rush of blood over all his body, the assault of unknown forces.

The little German girl, naïve and sensual, had odd little tricks. She would place her ring on a little pile of flour, and he would have to get it again and again with his teeth without whitening his nose. Or she would pass a thread through a biscuit, and put one end of it in her mouth and one in his, and then they had to nibble the thread to see who could get to the biscuit first. Their faces would come together ; they would

feel each other's breathing ; their lips would touch, and they would laugh forcedly, while their hands would turn to ice. Christopher would feel a desire to bite, to hurt ; he would fling back, and she would go on laughing forcedly. They would turn away, pretend indifference, and steal glances at each other.

These disturbing games had a disquieting attraction for them ; they wanted to play them, and yet avoided them. Christopher was fearful of them, and preferred even the constraint of the meetings when Frau von Kerich or someone else was present. No outside presence could break in upon the converse of their loving hearts ; constraint only made their love sweeter and more intense. Everything gained infinitely in value : a word, a movement of the lips, a glance were enough to make the rich new treasure of their inner life shine through the dull veil of ordinary life. They alone could see it, or so they thought, and smiled, happy in their little mysteries. Their words were no more than those of a drawing-room conversation about trivial matters ; to them they were an unending song of love. They read the most fleeting changes in their faces and voices as in an open book ; they could have read as well with their eyes closed, for they had only to listen to their hearts to hear in them the echo of the heart of the beloved. They were full of confidence in life, in happiness, in themselves. Their hopes were boundless. They loved, they were loved, happy, without a shadow, without a doubt, without a fear of the future. Wonderful serenity of those days of spring ! Not a cloud in the sky. A faith so fresh that it seems that nothing can ever tarnish it. A joy so abounding that nothing can ever exhaust it. Are they living ? Are they

dreaming ? Doubtless they are dreaming. There is nothing in common between life and their dream—nothing, except in that moment of magic : they are but a dream themselves ; their being has melted away at the touch of love.

It was not long before Frau von Kerich perceived their little intrigue, which they thought very subtly done, though it was very clumsy. Minna had suspected it from the moment when her mother had entered suddenly one day when she was talking to Christopher, and standing as near to him as she could, and on the click of the door they had darted apart as quickly as possible, covered with confusion. Frau von Kerich had pretended to see nothing. Minna was almost sorry. She would have liked a tussle with her mother ; it would have been more romantic.

Her mother took care to give her no opportunity for it ; she was too clever to be anxious, or to make any remark about it. But to Minna she talked ironically about Christopher, and made merciless fun of his foibles ; she demolished him in a few words. She did not do it deliberately ; she acted upon instinct, with the treachery natural to a woman who is defending her own. It was useless for Minna to resist, and sulk, and be impertinent, and go on denying the truth of her remarks ; there was only too much justification for them, and Frau von Kerich had a cruel skill in flicking the raw spot. The largeness of Christopher's boots, the ugliness of his clothes, his ill-brushed hat, his provincial accent, his ridiculous way of bowing, the vulgarity of his loud-voicedness, nothing was forgotten which might sting Minna's vanity. Such remarks were

always simple and made by the way ; they never took the form of a set speech, and when Minna, irritably got upon her high horse to reply, Frau von Kerich would innocently be off on another subject. But the blow struck home, and Minna was sore under it.

She began to look at Christopher with a less indulgent eye. He was vaguely conscious of it, and uneasily asked her :

“ Why do you look at me like that ? ”

And she answered :

“ Oh, nothing ! ”

But a moment after, when he was merry, she would harshly reproach him for laughing so loudly. He was abashed ; he never would have thought that he would have to take care not to laugh too loudly with her : all his gaiety was spoiled. Or when he was talking absolutely at his ease, she would absently interrupt him to make some unpleasant remark about his clothes, or she would take exception to his common expressions with pedantic aggressiveness. Then he would lose all desire to talk, and sometimes would be cross. Then he would persuade himself that these ways which so irritated him were a proof of Minna's interest in him, and she would persuade herself also that it was so. He would try humbly to do better. But she was never much pleased with him, for he hardly ever succeeded.

But he had no time—nor had Minna—to perceive the change that was taking place in her. Easter came, and Minna had to go with her mother to stay with some relations near Weimar.

During the last week before the separation they returned to the intimacy of the first days. Except for

little outbursts of impatience Minna was more affectionate than ever. On the eve of her departure they went for a long walk in the park ; she led Christopher mysteriously to the arbour, and put about his neck a little scented bag, in which she had placed a lock of her hair ; they renewed their eternal vows, and swore to write to each other every day ; and they chose a star out of the sky, and arranged to look at it every evening at the same time.

The fatal day arrived. Ten times during the night he had asked himself, "Where will she be to-morrow ?" and now he thought, "It is to-day. This morning she is still here ; to-night she will be here no longer." He went to her house before eight o'clock. She was not up ; he set out to walk in the park ; he could not ; he returned. The passages were full of boxes and parcels ; he sat down in a corner of the room listening for the creaking of doors and floors, and recognizing the footsteps on the floor above him. Frau von Kerich passed, smiled as she saw him, and, without stopping, threw him a mocking good-day. Minna came at last ; she was pale, her eyelids were swollen ; she had not slept any more than he during the night. She gave orders busily to the servants ; she held out her hand to Christopher, and went on talking to old Frida. She was ready to go. Frau von Kerich came back. They argued about a hat-box. Minna seemed to pay no attention to Christopher, who was standing, forgotten and unhappy, by the piano. She went out with her mother, then came back ; from the door she called out to Frau von Kerich. She closed the door. They were alone. She ran to him, took his hand, and dragged him into the little room next door ;

its shutters were closed. Then she put her face up to Christopher's and kissed him wildly. With tears in her eyes she said :

“ You promise—you promise, that you will love me always ?”

They sobbed quietly, and made convulsive efforts to choke their sobs down so as not to be heard. They broke apart as they heard footsteps approaching. Minna dried her eyes, and resumed her busy air with the servants, but her voice trembled.

He succeeded in snatching her handkerchief, which she had let fall—her little dirty handkerchief, crumpled and wet with her tears.

He went to the station with his friends in their carriage. Sitting opposite each other Christopher and Minna hardly dared look at each other for fear of bursting into tears. Their hands sought each other, and clasped until they hurt each other. Frau von Kerich watched them with quizzical good-humour, and seemed not to see anything. The time arrived. Christopher was standing by the door of the train when it began to move, and he ran alongside the carriage, not looking where he was going, jostling against porters, his eyes fixed on Minna's eyes, until the train was gone. He went on running until it was lost from sight. Then he stopped, out of breath, and he found himself on the station platform among people of no importance. He went home, and, fortunately, his family were all out, and all through the morning he wept.

For the first time he knew the frightful sorrow of parting, an intolerable torture for all loving hearts. The world is empty ; life is empty ; all is empty. The

heart is choked ; it is impossible to breathe ; there is mortal agony ; it is difficult, impossible, to live—especially when all around you there are the traces of the departed loved one, when everything about you is for ever calling up her image, when you remain in the surroundings in which you lived together, she and you. when it is a torment to try to live again in the same places the happiness that is gone. Then it is as though an abyss were opened at your feet ; you lean over it ; you turn giddy ; you almost fall. You fall. You think you are face to face with Death. And so you are ; parting is one of his faces. You watch the beloved of your heart pass away ; life is effaced ; only a black hole is left—nothingness.

Christopher went and visited all the beloved spots, so as to suffer more. Frau von Kerich had left him the key of the garden, so that he could go there while they were away. He went there that very day, and was like to choke with sorrow. It seemed to him as he entered that he might find there a little of her who was gone ; he found only too much of her ; her image hovered over all the lawns ; he expected to see her appear at all the corners of the paths ; he knew well that she would not appear, but he tormented himself with pretending that she might, and he went over the tracks of his memories of love—the path to the labyrinth, the terrace carpeted with glycine, the seat in the arbour, and he inflicted torture on himself by saying : “ A week ago . . . three days ago . . . yesterday, it was so. Yesterday she was here . . . this very morning. . . . ” He racked his heart with these thoughts until he had to stop, choking, and like to die. In his sorrow was mingled anger with himself for having wasted all

that time, and not having made use of it. So many minutes, so many hours, when he had enjoyed the infinite happiness of seeing her, breathing her, and feeding upon her. And he had not appreciated it ! He had let the time go by without having tasted to the full every tiny moment ! And now ! . . . Now it was too late. . . . Irreparable ! Irreparable !

He went home. His family seemed odious to him. He could not bear their faces, their gestures, their fatuous conversation, the same as that of the preceding day, the same as that of all the preceding days—always the same. They went on living their usual life, as though no such misfortune had come to pass in their midst. And the town had no more idea of it than they. The people were all going about their affairs, laughing, noisy, busy ; the crickets were chirping ; the sky was bright. He hated them all ; he felt himself crushed by this universal egoism. But he himself was more egoistic than the whole universe. Nothing was worth while to him. He had no kindness. He loved nobody.

He passed several lamentable days. His work absorbed him again automatically : but he had no heart for living.

One evening when he was at supper with his family, silent and depressed, the postman knocked at the door and left a letter for him. His heart knew the sender of it before he had seen the handwriting. Four pairs of eyes, fixed on him with undisguised curiosity, waited for him to read it, clutching at the hope that this interruption might take them out of their usual boredom. He placed the letter by his plate, and would not open it, pretending carelessly that he knew

what it was about. But his brothers, annoyed, would not believe it, and went on prying at it ; and so he was in tortures until the meal was ended. Then he was free to lock himself up in his room. His heart was beating so that he almost tore the letter as he opened it. He trembled to think what might be in it ; but as soon as he had glanced over the first words he was filled with joy.

A few very affectionate words. Minna was writing to him by stealth. She called him "*Dear Christlein,*" and told him that she had wept much, had looked at the star every evening, that she had been to Frankfurt, which was a splendid town, where there were wonderful shops, but that she had never bothered about anything because she was thinking of him. She reminded him that he had sworn to be faithful to her, and not to see anybody while she was away, so that he might think only of her. She wanted him to work all the time while she was gone, so as to make himself famous, and her too. She ended by asking him if he remembered the little room where they had said good-bye on the morning when she had left him : she assured him that she would be there still in thought, and that she would still say good-bye to him in the same way. She signed herself, "*Eternally yours ! Eternally ! . . .*" and she had added a postscript bidding him buy a straw hat instead of his ugly felt—all the distinguished people there were wearing them—a coarse straw hat, with a broad blue ribbon.

Christopher read the letter four times before he could quite take it all in. He was so overwhelmed that he could not even be happy ; and suddenly he felt so tired that he lay down and read and re-read the

letter and kissed it again and again. He put it under his pillow, and his hand was for ever making sure that it was there. An ineffable sense of well-being permeated his whole soul. He slept all through the night.

His life became more tolerable. He had ever sweet, soaring thoughts of Minna. He set about answering her ; but he could not write freely to her ; he had to hide his feelings : that was painful and difficult for him. He continued clumsily to conceal his love beneath formulæ of ceremonious politeness, which he always used in an absurd fashion.

When he had sent it he awaited Minna's reply, and only lived in expectation of it. To win patience he tried to go for walks and to read. But his thoughts were only of Minna : he went on crazily repeating her name over and over again ; he was so abject in his love and worship of her name that he carried everywhere with him a volume of Lessing, because the name of Minna occurred in it, and every day when he left the theatre he went a long distance out of his way so as to pass a mercery shop, on whose signboard the five adored letters were written.

He reproached himself for wasting time when she had bid him so urgently to work, so as to make her famous. The naive vanity of her request touched him, as a mark of her confidence in him. He resolved, by way of fulfilling it, to write a work which should be not only dedicated, but consecrated, to her. He could not have written any other at that time. Hardly had the scheme occurred to him than musical ideas rushed in upon him. It was like a flood of water accumulated in a reservoir for several months, until it should sud-

denly rush down, breaking all its dams. He did not leave his room for a week. Louisa left his dinner at the door ; for he did not allow even her to enter.

He wrote a quintette for clarinet and strings. The first movement was a poem of youthful hope and desire ; the last a lover's joke, in which Christopher's wild humour peeped out. But the whole work was written for the sake of the second movement, the *larghetto*, in which Christopher had depicted an ardent and ingenuous little soul, which was, or was meant to be, a portrait of Minna. No one would have recognized it, least of all herself ; but the great thing was that it was perfectly recognizable to himself ; and he had a thrill of pleasure in the illusion of feeling that he had caught the essence of his beloved. No work had ever been so easily or happily written ; it was an outlet for the excess of love which the parting had stored up in him ; and at the same time his care for the work of art, the effort necessary to dominate and concentrate his passion into a beautiful and clear form, gave him a healthiness of mind, a balance in his faculties, which gave him a sort of physical delight—a sovereign enjoyment known to every creative artist. While he is creating he escapes altogether from the slavery of desire and sorrow ; he becomes then master in his turn ; and all that gave him joy or suffering seems then to him to be only the fine play of his will. Such moments are too short ; for when they are done he finds about him, more heavy than ever, the chains of reality.

While Christopher was busy with his work he hardly had time to think of his parting from Minna ; he was living with her. Minna was no longer in Minna ; she

was in himself. But when he had finished he found that he was alone, more alone than before, more weary, exhausted by the effort ; he remembered that it was a fortnight since he had written to Minna and that she had not replied.

He wrote to her again, and this time he could not bring himself altogether to exercise the constraint which he had imposed on himself for the first letter. He reproached Minna jocularly—for he did not believe it himself—with having forgotten him. He scolded her for her laziness and teased her affectionately. He spoke of his work with much mystery, so as to rouse her curiosity, and because he wished to keep it as a surprise for her when she returned. He described minutely the hat that he had bought ; and he told how, to carry out the little despot's orders—for he had taken all her commands literally—he did not go out at all, and said that he was ill as an excuse for refusing invitations. He did not add that he was even on bad terms with the Grand Duke, because, in excess of zeal, he had refused to go to a party at the Palace to which he had been invited. The whole letter was full of a careless joy, and conveyed those little secrets so dear to lovers. He imagined that Minna alone had the key to them, and thought himself very clever, because he had carefully replaced every word of love with words of friendship.

After he had written he felt comforted for a moment ; first, because the letter had given him the illusion of conversation with his absent fair, but chiefly because he had no doubt but that Minna would reply to it at once. He was very patient for the three days which he had allowed for the post to take his letter to Minna

and bring back her answer ; but when the fourth day had passed he began once more to find life difficult. He had no energy or interest in things, except during the hour before the post's arrival. Then he was trembling with impatience. He became superstitious, and looked for the smallest sign—the crackling of the fire, a chance word—to give him an assurance that the letter would come. Once that hour was passed he would collapse again. No more work, no more walks ; the only object of his existence was to wait for the next post, and all his energy was expended in finding strength to wait for so long. But when evening came, and all hope was gone for the day, then he was crushed ; it seemed to him that he could never live until the morrow, and he would stay for hours, sitting at his table, without speaking or thinking, without even the power to go to bed, until some remnant of his will would take him off to it ; and he would sleep heavily, haunted by stupid dreams, which made him think that the night would never end.

This continual expectation became at length a physical torture, an actual illness. Christopher went so far as to suspect his father, his brother, even the postman, of having taken the letter and hidden it from him. He was racked with uneasiness. He never doubted Minna's fidelity for an instant. If she did not write, it must be because she was ill, dying, perhaps dead. Then he rushed to his pen and wrote a third letter, a few heartrending lines, in which he had no more thought of guarding his feelings than of taking care with his spelling. The time for the post to go was drawing near ; he had crossed out, and smudged the sheet as he turned it over, dirtied the

envelope as he closed it. No matter ! He could not wait until the next post. He ran and hurled his letter into the box and waited in mortal agony. On the next night but one he had a clear vision of Minna, ill, calling to him ; he got up, and was on the point of setting out on foot to go to her. But where ? Where should he find her ?

On the fourth morning Minna's letter came at last—hardly a half-sheet—cold and stiff. Minna said that she did not understand what could have filled him with such stupid fears, that she was quite well, that she had no time to write, and begged him not to get so excited in future, and not to write any more.

Christopher was stunned. He never doubted Minna's sincerity. He blamed himself ; he thought that Minna was justly annoyed by the impudent and absurd letters that he had written. He thought himself an idiot, and beat at his head with his fist. But it was all in vain ; he was forced to feel that Minna did not love him as much as he loved her.

The days that followed were so mournful that it is impossible to describe them. Nothingness cannot be described. Deprived of the only boon that made living worth while for him—his letters to Minna—Christopher now only lived mechanically, and the only thing which interested him at all was when in the evening, as he was going to bed, he ticked off on the calendar, like a schoolboy, one of the interminable days which lay between himself and Minna's return. The day of the return was past. They ought to have been at home a week. Feverish excitement had succeeded Christopher's prostration. Minna had promised when she left to advise him of the day and hour

of their arrival. He waited from moment to moment to go and meet them ; and he tied himself up in a web of guesses as to the reasons for their delay.

One evening one of their neighbours, a friend of his grandfather, Fischer, the furniture dealer, came in to smoke and chat with Melchior after dinner as he often did. Christopher, in torment, was going up to his room after waiting for the postman to pass when a word made him tremble. Fischer said that next day he had to go early in the morning to the Kerich's to hang up the curtains. Christopher stopped dead, and asked :

“ Have they returned ? ”

“ You wag ! You know that as well as I do,” said old Fischer roguishly. “ Fine weather ! They came back the day before yesterday.”

Christopher heard no more ; he left the room, and got ready to go out. His mother, who for some time had secretly been watching him without his knowing it, followed him into the lobby, and asked him timidly where he was going. He made no answer, and went out. He was hurt.

He ran to the Kerich's house. It was nine o'clock in the evening. They were both in the drawing-room and did not appear to be surprised to see him. They said “ Good-evening ” quietly. Minna was busy writing, and held out her hand over the table, and went on with her letter, vaguely asking him for his news. She asked him to forgive her discourtesy, and pretended to be listening to what he said, but she interrupted him to ask something of her mother. He had prepared touching words concerning all that he had suffered during her absence ; he could hardly summon a few

words ; no one was interested in them, and he had not the heart to go on—it all rang so false.

When Minna had finished her letter she took up some work, and, sitting a little away from him, began to tell him about her travels. She talked about the pleasant weeks she had spent—riding on horseback, country-house life, interesting society ; she got excited gradually, and made allusions to events and people whom Christopher did not know, and the memory of them made her mother and herself laugh. Christopher felt that he was a stranger during the story ; he did not know how to take it, and laughed awkwardly. He never took his eyes from Minna's face, beseeching her to look at him, imploring her to throw him a glance for alms. But when she did look at him—which was not often, for she addressed herself more to her mother than to him—her eyes, like her voice, were cold and indifferent. Was she so constrained because of her mother, or was it that he did not understand ? He wished to speak to her alone, but Frau von Kerich never left them for a moment. He tried to bring the conversation round to some subject interesting to himself ; he spoke of his work and his plans ; he was dimly conscious that Minna was evading him, and instinctively he tried to interest her in himself. Indeed, she seemed to listen attentively enough ; she broke in upon his narrative with various interjections, which were never very apt, but always seemed to be full of interest. But just as he was beginning to hope once more, carried off his feet by one of her charming smiles, he saw Minna put her little hand to her lips and yawn. He broke off short. She saw that, and asked his pardon amiably, saying that she was tired. He got

up, thinking that they would persuade him to stay, but they said nothing. He spun out his "Good-bye," and waited for a word to ask him to come again next day ; there was no suggestion of it. He had to go. Minna did not take him to the door. She held out her hand to him—an indifferent hand that drooped limply in his—and he took his leave of them in the middle of the room.

He went home with terror in his heart. Of the Minna of two months before, of his beloved Minna, nothing was left. What had happened ? What had become of her ? For a poor boy who has never yet experienced the continual change, the complete disappearance, and the absolute renovation of living souls, of which the majority are not so much souls as collections of souls in succession changing and dying away continually, the simple truth was too cruel for him to be able to believe it. He rejected the idea of it in terror, and tried to persuade himself that he had not been able to see properly, and that Minna was just the same. He decided to go again to the house next morning, and to talk to her at all costs.

He did not sleep. Through the night he counted one after another the chimes of the clock. From one o'clock on he was rambling round the Kerich's house ; he entered it as soon as he could. He did not see Minna, but Frau von Kerich. Always busy and an early riser, she was watering the pots of flowers on the verandah. She gave a mocking cry when she saw Christopher.

" Ah ! " she said. " It is you ! . . . I am glad you have come. I have something to talk to you about. Wait a moment. . . . "

She went in for a moment to put down her watering can and to dry her hands, and came back with a little smile as she saw Christopher's discomfiture ; he was conscious of the approach of disaster.

"Come into the garden," she said ; "we shall be quieter."

In the garden that was full still of his love he followed Frau von Kerich. She did not hasten to speak, and enjoyed the boy's uneasiness.

"Let us sit here," she said at last. They were sitting on the seat in the place where Minna had held up her lips to him on the eve of her departure.

"I think you know what is the matter," said Frau von Kerich, looking serious so as to complete his confusion. "I should never have thought it of you, Christopher. I thought you a serious boy. I had every confidence in you. I should never have thought that you would abuse it to try and turn my daughter's head. She was in your keeping. You ought to have shown respect for her, respect for me, respect for yourself."

There was a light irony in her accents. Frau von Kerich attached not the least importance to this childish love affair ; but Christopher was not conscious of it, and her reproaches, which he took, as he took everything, tragically, went to his heart.

"But, Madam . . . but, Madam . . ." he stammered, with tears in his eyes, "I have never abused your confidence. . . . Please do not think that. . . . I am not a bad man, that I swear ! . . . I love Fräulein Minna. I love her with all my soul, and I wish to marry her."

Frau von Kerich smiled.

"No, my poor boy," she said, with that kindly smile in which was so much disdain, as at last he was to understand, "no, it is impossible ; it is just a childish folly."

"Why ? Why ?" he asked.

He took her hands, not believing that she could be speaking seriously, and almost reassured by the new softness in her voice. She smiled still, and said :

"Because . . ."

He insisted. With ironical deliberation—she did not take him altogether seriously—she told him that he had no fortune, that Minna had different tastes. He protested that that made no difference ; that he would be rich, famous ; that he would win honours, money, all that Minna could desire. Frau von Kerich looked sceptical ; she was amused by his self-confidence, and only shook her head by way of saying no. But he stuck to it.

"No, Christopher," she said firmly, "no. It is not worth arguing. It is impossible. It is not only a question of money. So many things ! The position. . . ."

She had no need to finish. That was a needle that pierced to his very marrow. His eyes were opened. He saw the irony of the friendly smile, he saw the coldness of the kindly look, he understood suddenly what it was that separated him from this woman whom he loved as a son, this woman who seemed to treat him like a mother ; he was conscious of all that was patronizing and disdainful in her affection. He got up. He was pale. Frau von Kerich went on talking to him in her caressing voice, but it was the end ; he heard no more the music of the words ; he perceived under

every word the falseness of that elegant soul. He could not answer a word. He went. Everything about him was going round and round.

When he regained his room he flung himself on his bed, and gave way to a fit of anger and injured pride, just as he used to do when he was a little boy. He bit his pillow ; he crammed his handkerchief into his mouth, so that no one should hear him crying. He hated Frau von Kerich. He hated Minna. He despised them mightily. It seemed to him that he had been insulted, and he trembled with shame and rage. He had to reply, to take immediate action. If he could not avenge himself he would die.

He got up, and wrote an idiotically violent letter :

“MADAM,

“I do not know if, as you say, you have been deceived in me. But I do know that I have been cruelly deceived in you. I thought that you were my friends. You said so. You pretended to be so, and I loved you more than my life. I see now that it was all a lie, that your affection for me was only a sham ; you made use of me. I amused you, provided you with entertainment, made music for you. I was your servant. Your servant : that I am not ! I am no man’s servant !

“You have made me feel cruelly that I had no right to love your daughter. Nothing in the world can prevent my heart from loving where it loves, and if I am not your equal in rank, I am as noble as you. It is the heart that ennobles a man. If I am not a Count, I have perhaps more honour than many Counts. Lackey or Count, when a man insults me, I despise

him. I despise as much anyone who pretends to be noble, and is not noble of soul.

“Farewell! You have mistaken me. You have deceived me. I detest you!

“He who, in spite of you, loves, and will love till death, Fräulein Minna, *because she is his*, and nothing can take her from him.”

Hardly had he thrown his letter into the box than he was filled with terror at what he had done. He tried not to think of it, but certain phrases cropped up in his memory; he was in a cold sweat as he thought of Frau von Kerich reading those enormities. At first he was upheld by his very despair, but next day he saw that his letter could only bring about a final separation from Minna, and that seemed to him the direst of misfortunes. He still hoped that Frau von Kerich, who knew his violent fits, would not take it seriously, that she would only reprimand him severely, and — who knows? — that she would be touched perhaps by the sincerity of his passion. One word, and he would have thrown himself at her feet. He waited for five days. Then came a letter. She said:

“DEAR SIR,

“Since, as you say, there has been a misunderstanding between us, it would be wise not any further to prolong it. I should be very sorry to force upon you a relationship which has become painful to you. You will think it natural, therefore, that we should break it off. I hope that you will in time to come have no lack of other friends who will be able to

appreciate you as you wish to be appreciated. I have no doubt as to your future, and from a distance shall, with sympathy, follow your progress in your musical career. Kind regards.

“JOSEPHA VON KERICH.”

The most bitter reproaches would have been less cruel. Christopher saw that he was lost. It is possible to reply to an unjust accusation. But what is to be done against the negativeness of such polite indifference? He raged against it. He thought that he would never see Minna again, and he could not bear it. He felt how little all the pride in the world weighs against a little love. He forgot his dignity; he became cowardly; he wrote more letters, in which he implored forgiveness. They were no less stupid than the letter in which he had railed against her. They evoked no response. And everything was said.

He nearly died of it. He thought of killing himself. He thought of murder. At least, he imagined that he thought of it. He was possessed by incendiary and murderous desires. People have little idea of the paroxysm of love or hate which sometimes devours the hearts of children. It was the most terrible crisis of his childhood. It ended his childhood. It stiffened his will. But it came near to breaking it for ever.

He found life impossible. He would sit for hours with his elbows on the window-sill looking down into the courtyard, and dreaming, as he used to when he was a little boy, of some means of escaping from the torture of life when it became too great. The remedy was there, under his eyes. Immediate . . . immediate?

How could one know? . . . Perhaps after hours—centuries—horrible sufferings! . . . But so utter was his childish despair that he let himself be carried away by the giddy round of such thoughts.

Louisa saw that he was suffering. She could not gauge exactly what was happening to him, but her instinct gave her a dim warning of danger. She tried to approach her son, to discover his sorrow, so as to console him. But the poor woman had lost the habit of talking intimately to Christopher. For many years he had kept his thoughts to himself, and she had been too much taken up by the material cares of life to find time to discover them or divine them. Now that she would so gladly have come to his aid she knew not what to do. She hovered about him like a soul in torment; she would gladly have found words to bring him comfort, and she dared not speak for fear of irritating him. And in spite of all her care she did irritate him by her every gesture and by her very presence, for she was not very adroit, and he was not very indulgent. And yet he loved her; they loved each other. But so little is needed to part two creatures who are dear to each other, and love each other with all their hearts! A too violent expression, an awkward gesture, a harmless twitching of an eye or a nose, a trick of eating, walking, or laughing, a physical constraint which is beyond analysis. . . . You say that these things are nothing, and yet they are all the world. Often they are enough to keep a mother and a son, a brother and a brother, a friend and a friend, who live in proximity to each other, for ever strangers to each other.

Christopher did not find in his mother's grief a

sufficient prop in the crisis through which he was passing. Besides, what is the affection of others to the egoism of passion preoccupied with itself ?

One night when his family were sleeping, and he was sitting by his desk, not thinking or moving, he was engulfed in his perilous ideas, when a sound of footsteps resounded down the little silent street, and a knock on the door brought him from his stupor. There was a murmuring of thick voices. He remembered that his father had not come in, and he thought angrily that they were bringing him back drunk, as they had done a week or two before, when they had found him lying in the street. For Melchior had abandoned all restraint, and was more and more the victim of his vice, though his athletic health seemed not in the least to suffer from an excess and a recklessness which would have killed any other man. He ate enough for four, drank until he dropped, passed whole nights out of doors in icy rain, was knocked down and stunned in brawls, and would get up again next day, with his rowdy gaiety, wanting everybody about him to be gay too.

Louisa, hurrying up, rushed to open the door. Christopher, who had not budged, stopped his ears so as not to hear Melchior's vicious voice, and the tittering comments of the neighbours. . . .

. . . Suddenly a strange terror seized him ; for no reason he began to tremble, with his face hidden in his hands. And on the instant a piercing cry made him raise his head. He rushed to the door. . . .

In the midst of a group of men talking in low voices, in the dark passage, lit only by the flickering light of a lantern, lying, just as his grandfather had done, on a

stretcher, was a body dripping with water, motionless. Louisa was clinging to it and sobbing. They had just found Melchior drowned in the mill-race.

Christopher gave a cry. Everything else vanished ; all his other sorrows were swept aside. He threw himself on his father's body by Louisa's side, and they wept together.

Seated by the bedside, watching Melchior's last sleep, on whose face was now a severe and solemn expression, he felt the dark peace of death enter into his soul. His childish passion was gone from him like a fit of fever ; the icy breath of the grave had taken it all away. Minna, his pride, his love, and himself. . . . Alas ! What misery ! How small everything showed by the side of this reality, the only reality—death ! Was it worth while to suffer so much, to desire so much, to be so much put about to come in the end to that ! . . .

He watched his father's sleep, and he was filled with an infinite pity. He remembered the smallest of his acts of kindness and tenderness. For with all his faults Melchior was not bad ; there was much good in him. He loved his family. He was honest. He had a little of the uncompromising probity of the Kraffts, which, in all questions of morality and honour, suffered no discussion, and never would admit the least of those small moral impurities which so many people in society regard not altogether as faults. He was brave, and whenever there was any danger faced it with a sort of enjoyment. If he was extravagant himself, he was so for others too ; he could not bear anybody to be sad, and very gladly gave away all that belonged to him—and did not belong to him—to the poor devils he met by the wayside. All his qualities appeared to Christo-

pher now, and he invented some of them, or exaggerated them. It seemed to him that he had misunderstood his father. He reproached himself with not having loved him enough. He saw him as broken by Life ; he thought he heard that unhappy soul, drifting, too weak to struggle, crying out for the life so uselessly lost. He heard that lamentable entreaty that had so cut him to the heart one day :

“ Christopher ! Do not despise me ! ”

And he was overwhelmed by remorse. He threw himself on the bed, and kissed the dead face and wept. And as he had done that day, he said again :

“ Dear father, I do not despise you. I love you. Forgive me ! ”

But that piteous entreaty was not appeased, and went on :

“ Do not despise me ! Do not despise me ! ” And suddenly Christopher saw himself lying in the place of the dead man ; he heard the terrible words coming from his own lips ; he felt weighing on his heart the despair of a useless life, irreparably lost. And he thought in terror : “ Ah ! everything, all the suffering, all the misery in the world, rather than come to that ! . . . ” How near he had been to it ! Had he not all but yielded to the temptation to snap off his life himself, cowardly to escape his sorrow ? As if all the sorrows, all betrayals, were not childish griefs beside the torture and the crime of self-betrayal, denial of faith, of self-contempt in death !

He saw that life was a battle without armistice, without mercy, in which he who wishes to be a man worthy of the name of a man must for ever fight against whole armies of invisible enemies ; against the murderous

forces of Nature, uneasy desires, dark thoughts, treacherously leading him to degradation and destruction. He saw that he had been on the point of falling into the trap. He saw that happiness and love were only the friends of a moment to lead the heart to disarm and abdicate. And the little Puritan of fifteen heard the voice of his God :

“ Go, go, and never rest.”

“ But whither, Lord, shall I go ? Whatsoever I do, whithersoever I go, is not the end always the same ? Is not the end of all things in that ?”

“ Go on to Death, you who must die ! Go and suffer, you who must suffer ! You do not live to be happy. You live to fulfil my Law. Suffer ; die. But be what you must be—a Man.